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VOL. 8 ITALIAN MODERNITIES

Situated at the confluence of history, media and cultural studies, this book reconstructs the often deeply discordant and highly selective memories of the Holocaust in Italy in the postwar era. The author's core method is one of reception analysis, centred on the public responses to the many films and television programmes that have addressed the Holocaust from the 1940s to the present day. Tied to the heritage of Fascism, antifascism, and the Resistance, public memory of the Holocaust in Italy has changed greatly over the years. Self-acquitting myths of Italian innocence and victimhood, and universalising interpretations grounded in Catholicism and Communism, provided the initial frameworks for understanding the Holocaust. However, the last two decades have seen an increasing centrality of the Holocaust in memory culture but have also witnessed the establishment of a paradigm that relativises other fascist crimes and levels the differences between Fascism and antifascism. Working with the largest corpus yet established of Holocaust film and television in Italy, from the 1948 retelling of the Wandering Jew myth to Roberto Benigni's controversial *Life Is Beautiful*, from the American miniseries *Holocaust* to *Perlasca: The Courage of a Just Man*, *Conflicts of Memory* probes Italy's ongoing, if incomplete, process of coming to terms with this important aspect of its past.

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Emiliano Perra

• Conflicts of Memory



Conflicts of Memory

The Reception of Holocaust Films and TV Programmes in Italy, 1945 to the Present

Emiliano Perra

PETER LANG

ITALIAN MODERNITIES

Edited by

Pierpaolo Antonello and Robert Gordon,

University of Cambridge

The series aims to publish innovative research on the written, material and visual cultures and intellectual history of modern Italy, from the 19th century to the present day. It is open to a wide variety of different approaches and methodologies, disciplines and interdisciplinary fields: from literary criticism and comparative literature to archival history, from cultural studies to material culture, from film and media studies to art history. It is especially interested in work which articulates aspects of Italy's particular, and in many respects, peculiar, interactions with notions of modernity and postmodernity, broadly understood. It also aims to encourage critical dialogue between new developments in scholarship in Italy and in the English-speaking world.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Few historical events are as widely discussed and represented as the Holocaust. The destruction of the European Jews sits now squarely at the centre of global memory culture and public debates.¹ However, for many years after the end of the Second World War, Holocaust memory emerged primarily within a national framework of reference, and to a large extent this remains the case.² In this process of adaptation to different national contexts, the Holocaust has been employed well beyond its specific historical meaning by different subjects.³ This also holds true in the Italian context.

This book is a study of the public debates generated by Holocaust films and television programmes in Italy, from the end of the Second World War to the present. It is by now a truism that films (especially feature films) and television play a key role in creating and reviving our perception of the Holocaust.⁴ The encounter between these popular media and a subject like the Holocaust is likely to provoke intense responses. This study reconstructs the various constellations of meaning that were made available to viewers at the time of the release of these visual products. Situated at the junction of political and cultural themes, the debates engendered by such representations in newspapers, magazines, and journals represent a vantage point for looking into the broader construction of Holocaust memories in Italy. This 'domestication', in turn, refers to the diverse (and

1 Alan Mintz has defined this process as a shift from silence to salience; see Mintz 2001: 4.

2 Fogu and Kansteiner 2006: 293.

3 Wollaston 2001: 507.

4 Doneson 1998: 144; Loshitzky 1997: 1–2; Doneson 2002: 6; Baron 2005: 6.

often conflicting) ways in which the Holocaust has been appropriated by different political and cultural actors.

This focus provides the rationale for structuring the book as a study of reception. Films and TV programmes are not simply cultural products originating and made public in a vacuum, rather their interpretation is a complex process involving social, cultural, and political practices.⁵ Focusing on these products' immediate reception is a means of exploring how different historical circumstances gave rise to a variety of interpretive strategies. For this reason, the textual analysis of films and television is not a primary objective of this book – although an element of close reading of the visual texts will be present, in particular whenever their reception is limited or non-existent, as in the case of many TV programmes. A second consequence of this focus on debates is that the visual products discussed in this book are not selected strictly according to their national origin. In other words, readers will not find a history of Italian Holocaust films or television,⁶ but a study of significant trends in Italian debates on the Holocaust as they emerge from the reception of films and TV programmes by political and intellectual opinion makers.

The place held by the Holocaust in Italian memory culture has not yet been fully investigated, despite the fact that the country's historical specificity differentiates it from other national contexts.⁷ It is therefore important to first acknowledge Italy's determining contexts (setting aside for the time being the presence of the Vatican discussed in Chapter Seven) and then situate its case within the existing literature.

5 Confino 1997: 1399.

6 On this, see Lichtner 2008; Marcus 2007.

7 With an interesting analogy, Richard Bosworth has defined Italy as 'a sort of Western Yugoslavia, a border state of its bloc'; see Bosworth 2006: 1090.

Italian memories of the Holocaust

The first and very obvious feature specific to the Italian case is that Italy was the country where Fascism was born. While most European states, with the obvious exception of Germany, experienced fascist governments only for limited periods, Mussolini's regime ruled Italy for more than twenty years, reaching an effective consensus within society. Although the regime promulgated its anti-Semitic laws in 1938, the rate of survival among Italy's Jewish population at the end of the war was among the highest in Europe.⁸ During the war, Italy shifted from the position of co-perpetrator of Nazi policy to that of co-belligerent with the Allies. The civil war that followed the collapse of the regime and the armistice forced many Italians to assume life-changing decisions.⁹ Some sided with the Mussolini-led *Repubblica Sociale Italiana* (RSI, Italian Social Republic) and collaborated with the Nazis.¹⁰ Others joined or supported the Resistance. The majority did not take sides.¹¹

The deportations from Italy occurred in the midst of a civil war and under German occupation. The arrests of the Jews carried out by the Nazis and their Italian collaborators (often with decisive help of local informers) took place at a time of mass killings of non-Jewish civilians, and deportations of members of the Resistance and the army, as well as conscript workers. The more than 8,000 Jews deported from Italy were only a fraction of the overall figure of 43 to 54,000 (mainly political) civilian deportees. If we add to this figure the c. 650,000 deported soldiers (who were in turn part of the around 1.2 million Italian prisoners of war), it is understandable that the Jewish experience of deportation did not emerge as significantly differ-

8 Zuccotti 1996: 272. Joshua Zimmerman identifies this characteristic as the main reason why the Holocaust in Italy has received little attention from historians until recently; see Zimmerman 2005: 1–2.

9 Pavone 1991.

10 Ganapini 1999; Lepre 1999.

11 Lepre 2003: 218.

ent in the aftermath of the war.¹² Italian deportees were lumped together under the umbrella category of DPs (displaced persons), a term that served to blur distinctions among them.¹³

These complex historical factors led to the construction of numerous markedly different and often conflicting strands of memory of the war.¹⁴ In the rigidly polarised Cold War climate, the mutually exclusive anti- and neo-fascist public narratives were reflected in political debates, thus reinforcing rather than dissolving these conflicts of memory.¹⁵ Moreover, beneath these two broad public narratives lay a myriad of ‘pulverised’ memories of the war.¹⁶ Anna Cento’s definition of Italy as a country lacking a consensus on dealing with the past both among elites and in civil society, leading to ever-failing attempts at national reconciliation, although originally referring to the ‘leaden years’, also applies to the memory of the war¹⁷ and accounts for the coexistence of radically diverging mythical narratives of the war in the Italian cultural context.

The fascist and neo-fascist myths proved resilient notwithstanding the political isolation of the nostalgic neo-fascist movement. For example, between the end of the 1940s and the early 1950s the weekly review

12 See Picciotto 2002: 28, 34; Fantini 2005: 9; Rossi-Doria 1998: 39; Ben-Ghiat 2001b: 255–6.

13 Gordon 2006b: 90–1; Matard-Bonucci 1999.

14 After completing this book, John Foot’s thought-provoking *Italy’s Divided Memory* was published. Foot defines the whole history of Italy since unification as being marked by a series of high- and low-level civil wars, which have engendered divided memories often at odds with dominant narratives; Foot 2009: 11. Foot sees in the Italian state’s inability to create a consensus over the past the ultimate cause of the lack of closure pervading Italian history (14). As a result, the politicisation of history has limited debate of controversial topics (11). In this context, Italian elites have often supported a sanitized version of national history that played on the few unproblematic areas; among them, the myth of the ‘good Italian’ (21), which occupies large portions of my book.

15 Bartram 1996: 13.

16 Isnenghi 1989: 247; Rusconi 1995: 7; Pezzino 2005: 404 correctly defines the Resistance experience as “culturally” in the minority.’

17 Cento Bull 2008: 409–10.

Rivolta ideale, the flagship of the neo-fascist press, reached an impressive circulation of 150,000 copies in a country with low levels of literacy,¹⁸ while the Minister of Defence of Mussolini’s Italian Social Republic Rodolfo Graziani’s autobiography entitled *I Defended the Country* was a best seller of those years.¹⁹ Among the themes of this literature was the idea that the real country was the one ‘betrayed’ by the armistice and by antifascists, who were described as fifth columns of the Soviet Union. These themes have resurfaced and gained wide currency (especially in the press) since the 1990s, in line with the crisis of the antifascist paradigm.²⁰

The Resistance narrative, in turn, was far from univocal. The communist left pushed a double agenda, simultaneously presenting the Resistance as a mass movement of national liberation and as a class war or interrupted revolution.²¹ The former served as a means of legitimising the *Partito Comunista Italiano* (PCI, Italian Communist Party) through the legitimisation of the Resistance (and the role communists played in it); the latter was used as a powerful rallying cry to mobilise its constituency. This view was contested by the Catholic *Democrazia Cristiana* (DC, Christian Democracy) party, which in the Cold War climate supported a narrative based on depriving the Resistance of any broader political and social aims, and proposed the unity of Italians against Soviet influence.²² At the root of these diverging postwar interpretations was a different understanding of what Fascism was. Moderate forces saw Fascism and Nazism as forms of totalitarianism, a phenomenon that also included Communism. They therefore emphasised the criminal use of state force by these regimes. In

18 Focardi 2005: 21.

19 Graziani 1947. On the elaboration of a post- and neo-fascist memory in Italy, see Germinario 1999.

20 On the armistice made public on 8 September 1943 as the ‘death of the nation’, see Galli Della Loggia 1996. See also Mammone 2006: 213–14; De Luna 2000: 445–61; Bosworth 1999: 84–99.

21 On this, see Ganapini 1986: 98–105.

22 Focardi 2005: 23–7.

contrast, the left focused on 'Nazi-Fascism' as a form of capitalism that necessarily engendered a violent form of class-struggle.²³

While they disagreed on what Fascism was, both leftist parties and the DC downplayed Italian complicity and shifted the burden of responsibility onto the Nazis and their fascist collaborators, thus corroborating the category of the 'evil German' as opposed to the 'good Italian',²⁴ and de-emphasising Jewish suffering brought about by Fascism alone from 1938 onwards. The reason for the construction of this narrative of the Holocaust was simple: the more Italy and Germany could be distanced from one another, the less responsibility lay on Italians, and the better the Republic of Italy would fare in postwar agreements.²⁵ For many years this hegemonic narrative influenced the ways in which the Holocaust was commemorated by Jewish institutions and remembered by survivors in their memoirs, which centred predominantly on episodes of help from non-Jews and on the last two years of war.²⁶

The 'myth of the good Italian' is a further specificity of Italy, and it emerges frequently in this work.²⁷ Although its first appearance dates back to the end of the nineteenth century, with the first colonial ventures and massacres,²⁸ its protean nature meant that it has remained strong notwithstanding the changing contexts. Appealing to established self-representations of Italians as cunning, law-bending but ultimately good-hearted and tolerant soldiers and citizens, this stereotype remained dynamic throughout the postwar period (and it is still influential to this day). In fact, it represents perhaps the single most important unifying narrative about the war, within an otherwise deeply fractured spectrum of the politics of memory.

Tightly linked to this is the persistence of what I define as a strong narrative of innocence and victimhood in Italian public memory of the Holocaust and the war. This book explores how this culture of victimhood

23 Bosworth 1999: 88–9.

24 See on this Focardi 1996: 55–83; and Focardi 2005: 9.

25 Focardi 2005: 4–5.

26 Sassoon 2001: 12; Schwarz 2004: 112–19.

27 Bidussa 1994.

28 Del Boca 2005: 49.

has mediated the reception of Holocaust themes and representations and shows that it has represented a formidable obstacle towards acknowledging the reality of the Holocaust as an event in which Italy was implicated.²⁹ The Italian problem with the Holocaust cannot be easily pigeonholed in a theoretical framework of silence and repression. What has always been problematic in the Italian context has been not so much the acknowledgement of the Holocaust as such, but the widespread adoption of selective forms of memory that constructed the Holocaust as a terrible but essentially foreign event.³⁰

Another factor that influenced Italian narratives of the Holocaust (and in general those of countries that experienced Nazi occupation) was that of understanding the mass killings of Jews, especially those carried out outside the industrialised system of the camps, as one of many extreme manifestations of Nazi brutality. Occupied Italy experienced its share of these massacres of civilians, some of which immediately became symbols of more general Italian suffering.³¹ This understanding of Nazi violence concurred in conflating the Holocaust into a version of national history in which the killing of Jews was read as part of the broader indiscriminate killing of civilians.³² This generalisation of Nazi violence was compatible with its universalisation, and in many quarters the Holocaust was frequently read as the epitome of not only Nazism, but also Fascism, totalitarianism, and the dark side of modernity.

As this cursory outline shows, the memory of the Second World War and the Holocaust in Italy is highly politicised. This is not surprising in a country in which political identities have been extremely important, and where extensive areas of collective life have traditionally been significantly

29 See on this Bravo and Jalla 1986: 21–2.

30 Rossi-Doria, 1998: 33. Primo Levi's predilection for the German term *Lager* and its widespread use in Italy have been defined as part of this distancing approach by Gordon, 2006b: 109. See also Sullam Calimani 2001: 39–41.

31 See Klinkhammer 2006: 195–202 for an up-to-date bibliography; Gribaudo 2005: 20 n 22 for a detail of some local studies.

32 Gordon 2006b: 91.

influenced by political parties.³³ The peculiarity of this predominance of the political sphere over other areas of social life was further amplified by the fact that the two hegemonic cultures (Communism and Catholicism) were far from dominant in the rest of Western Europe.³⁴ As a result of this politicisation, memories of the Holocaust were often institutionalised in postwar Italy according to criteria of political affiliations among communists, socialists, Catholics, liberals and lay centrist, non-fascist conservatives, and neo-fascists. The most relevant (and fractured) narratives about the conflict are more effectively highlighted along these lines.

In my work, the divide between the communist and the catholic political cultures emerges repeatedly as an important theme. However, emphasising the centrality of these two forces' understanding of Italian history implies neither that there was not space for other cultures, nor that the division between communists and catholics was always clear-cut. In fact, the DC may have been (until its collapse in the 1990s) the Catholic party, but only 50 per cent of its constituents were regular church-goers, just as the PCI was clearly a secular party, but 40 per cent of its voters were believers.³⁵ In other words, individual identities are formed by a multiplicity of elements coexisting at once.

For this reason, gauging the responses of empirical subjects is far from easy, whatever the context. As Janet Steiger suggests, 'what the researcher must often do is resort to very contaminated evidence or convoluted and speculative analysis.'³⁶ It is in part because of these methodological difficulties that this book is not primarily centred on viewers' responses, but on how Holocaust films and television were received in the cultural and political world. The need to preserve the distinction between public narratives constructed by political-cultural subjects and individual responses to Holocaust visual products is made even more cogent by the relatively low figures for literary consumption among the population.³⁷ The number of

33 Ventresca 2004: 17; Foot 2003: 171.

34 Sassoon 1997: 7–10.

35 Sassoon, 1997: 158.

36 Staiger 2000: 118.

37 Lumley 2000: 569; Wagstaff 2001: 299.

Italian newspaper readers has remained steady at around 5 million (excluding the popular sport dailies) since the end of the war. This means that there has always been a large section of Italian society whose worldview is not directly determined or influenced by the press. However, while caution is needed in order to avoid simplifying generalisations about the relationship between viewers and films, it is also worth remembering that newspapers and periodical magazines (the latter totalling an average of around 12 million copies per week) play a significant role in the construction of a visual product's social identity.³⁸ The centrality of political parties in shaping public debates in Italy is reflected in the particular importance of their dailies. *Secolo d'Italia* (MSI, Italian Social Movement), *Il Popolo* (DC), *Avanti!* (PSI, Italian Socialist Party) were more than internal bulletins for party-members. The scope of *l'Unità* (PCI) went still further, with the paper enjoying a circulation of tens of thousands of copies.

Robert Gordon argues that the influence of politics on Italian memory of the Holocaust is not all-defining. He defines the imposing figure of Primo Levi (the single most important cultural mediator of the Holocaust for the Italian context) as an antidote against the divisiveness of Italian politics.³⁹ Yet, there is no real contradiction between stressing the importance of Levi for Italy, and nonetheless emphasising the influence of political factors in shaping the reception of Holocaust themes. After all, as Gordon himself notes, Levi's position was 'relatively marginal to the core centres of intellectual activity of the time. [...] He was left-leaning [...] but in no way connected to the PCI, or the fellow-travelling communist or even ex-communist intellectuals who had shaped so much of postwar Italian culture.'⁴⁰ In other words, he has been deeply influential in familiarising Italians with the Holocaust, in no small part thanks to his non-militant humanism. But, for this same reason, he was not strictly an opinion-maker in the day-to-day cultural debate. One example of this appears in Chapter Five, where I

38 For these figures, see Sassoon, 1997: 162–3.

39 Gordon, 2006b: 113.

40 Gordon, 2006b: 94. On the reception of Levi's work by the Italian cultural establishment, see Cannon 1992: 30–44.

analyse the discussions engendered by the miniseries *Holocaust* (Marvin J. Chomsky, NBC, 1978). Levi's comments on the educational value (albeit simplified) of the miniseries, and on the importance of deepening public historical understanding of the Holocaust, did not restrain the majority of the press from appropriating the miniseries in order to talk about other issues often completely unrelated to the Holocaust.

Periodisation of national memories of the Holocaust

These specificities of the Italian case do not isolate it from other national contexts. The shifts in the construction of Holocaust memory in Italy can be compared to those in other countries. Italian discussions of the Holocaust were the result of the combination of national and international political and cultural developments. Numerous studies have appeared on the political and cultural place occupied by the Holocaust in the United States, the two Germanys, Israel, France, Austria, and Poland.⁴¹ In very general terms, this body of works suggests that, notwithstanding their differences, in all these countries the Holocaust has moved from the periphery to the centre of political memory and public narratives. After a long period of silence following the war, the Holocaust became less and less peripheral in the 1960s and 1970s, prior to emerging on a wide scale as a central memory in the 1980s and an object of mass awareness in the 1990s.⁴² Among the factors that served to obstruct a confrontation with the Holocaust in the

41 For the United States, see Novick 1999; Mintz, 2001; Flanzbaum 1999. For Germany, see Herf 1997; Kattago 2001; Fox 1999; Schissler 2001; Fulbrook 1999. For the Israeli case, see Segev 2000; Zertal 2005. For France, see Wiedmer 1999; Wolf 2004. For Austria, see Pick 2000. Finally, for Poland, see Huener 2003.

42 For an application of this chronology to the Italian case, see Gordon, 2006b: 87–8. More generally, Tim Cole and Peter Novick see the years between 1967 and 1973 as the cornerstones for the growth of Holocaust consciousness in America; see Novick 1999: 149, and Cole 2000: 9. Emphasis on the centrality of the 1960s can also be

West in the immediate postwar were the international political developments of the Cold War, which led to a situation in which the Holocaust was the 'wrong atrocity'.⁴³

The broad definition of the years between the end of the Second World War and the Eichmann trial in 1961 as an age of substantial silence in all Western countries represents a staple of many reflections about Holocaust representations. If we compare those years with the present, this claim would appear *prima facie* self-evident. The volume and depth of Holocaust-related discussion increasingly produced worldwide in the last forty years would easily dwarf and overshadow anything produced in the past. However, detailed research has contributed to the construction of a more nuanced picture. Jeffrey Shandler's work on the Holocaust in American television has shown that the destruction of the Jews featured in talk shows and popular dramas in the early days of this powerful medium in America.⁴⁴ Also referring to the American case, Lawrence Baron, Jeffrey Herf, and Michael Morgan have offered a number of examples of reactions to the event ranging from history-writing to philosophical and literary essays, memoirs, plays and other forms of popularisation that represent early forms of domestication of the Holocaust.⁴⁵ Nor was this an exclusively American development. As Herf has argued in relation to Germany, the 'multiple restorations' of non- and anti-Nazi political cultures after 1945 allowed for the establishment of a (albeit minoritarian) tradition of memory of Nazi

found in Kushner 1994: 2–3; Mintz, 2001: 4; Lipstadt 1996: 195. The watershed in France was the 1967 War according to Wolf 2004: 17.

43 Traverso 2004: 228–31. The phrase 'wrong atrocity' is borrowed from Novick 1999: 87. Writing about France, André Pierre Colombat and Joshua Hirsch have argued that, after the war, 'racial' deportations became the object of a massive symbolic repression in public discussion and in films, overshadowed by the Resistance myth. See Colombat 1993: 20–1; Hirsch 2004: 29. In a similar manner, Jeffrey Herf argues that in postwar West Germany the price for integration of those compromised with the Third Reich was silence in dominant political discourse about the crimes of that period, and that it was only in the 1960s that the link between democracy and memory was established; see Herf 1997: 7.

44 Shandler 1999: 27–79.

45 Baron 2003: 62–88; Herf 2004a: 461; Morgan 2001: 9, 29–30.

crimes which laid the ground for a more open discussion of the German past in the following decades.⁴⁶

Shifting from political narratives to Holocaust representations, in his work on Holocaust cinema Lawrence Baron has listed forty-four feature films on Holocaust themes produced worldwide between 1945 and 1949, twelve of which came from the Soviet Bloc – among them the highly influential *Ostatni Etap* (The Last Stop, Wanda Jakubowska, 1948), written, directed, and performed by survivors of Auschwitz and shot inside the camp.⁴⁷ Anticipating a theme I will develop in a later section of this chapter, I suggest that what allows Baron to include many films as early examples of Holocaust-influenced cinema, is his extensive (but no less legitimate) understanding of the word Holocaust. Drawing upon Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Ippermann's definition of Nazi Germany as a 'racial state',⁴⁸ Baron considers any group that the Nazis persecuted on the grounds that they posed a threat to the 'Aryan race' as victims of the Holocaust.⁴⁹ This view is consistent with Baron's claim that the meaning of the Holocaust is not fixed but changes with time and place, and that if societies 'did not understand the Holocaust in the ways they do today, it does not [necessarily] mean they lacked awareness of the event or repressed the memory of it.'⁵⁰

A similar point can be made about Italy. The view of the 1950s as a decade of silence about the Holocaust is only partially accurate. The six memoirs written by Jewish survivors of the camps between 1945 and 1947, five by women plus the first edition of Primo Levi's *Se questo è un uomo* (If This Is a Man) were not followed by others in the following decade.⁵¹ The next film set in a concentration camp with a Jewish protagonist after *L'ebreo errante* (The Wandering Jew, Goffredo Alessandrini, 1948) was *Kapo*

46 Herf 1997: 3; Herf 2004b: 40.

47 See on this film Loewy 2004: 179–204; Baron 2005: 24–5.

48 Burleigh and Ippermann 1991.

49 Baron, 2005: 12.

50 Baron 2003: 63.

51 Bravo 2003: 128. For a closer look at this body of writings, see Gordon 2000: 32–50.

(Kapo, Gillo Pontecorvo, 1960). Primo Levi's first unsuccessful attempt at publication would seem to point in the same direction. Levi sent a copy of the manuscript to the Turin publisher Einaudi. The manuscript was rejected by Natalia Ginzburg, who was editor at the time, because it did not fit with the house's editorial plans.⁵² The book was eventually released in 1947 by the small publisher De Silva in 2,500 copies, and only eleven years later was it accepted for publication by Einaudi.⁵³ As Levi himself said recalling the period, survivors' accounts sit oddly with the characteristic optimism that was a feature of the immediate postwar period of reconstruction.⁵⁴

However, this view is subject to qualification. Focusing on memoirs, Anna Bravo and Daniele Jalla have limited the area of 'silence' to the most intense years of the Cold War and DC rule between 1948 and 1952.⁵⁵ After all, even a novella like Giorgio Bassani's 'Una lapide in via Mazzini' ('A Plaque on Via Mazzini', 1952) about the difficulties encountered by a Jewish survivor in finding understanding from his fellow citizens, was a way to address the memory of the Holocaust.⁵⁶ Moreover, although the first comprehensive history of the Italian Jews during Fascism was published only in 1961,⁵⁷ shorter studies had already appeared prior to this point,⁵⁸ and a number of histories of Nazism and the Holocaust were also translated into Italian.⁵⁹ What prompted Einaudi to publish Levi's memoir was the unexpected public interest generated by the first exhibition on deporta-

52 The publication history is detailed in 'Note ai testi' 1997a: 1382–3.

53 By 1997, the book had sold 1,379,000 copies; see 'Note ai testi' 1997a: 1391.

54 'Note ai testi' 1997a: 1382.

55 Bravo and Jalla 1986; Bravo and Jalla 1994: 65. Cavaglian 1998b: 151 defines 1949 as the beginning of 'silence'.

56 Bassani 1998c. On this novella, see Wardi 1989: 1636–41.

57 De Felice 1961. On the genesis of this book, see Schwarz 2004: 164–72.

58 These included not only the whitewashed story of fascist persecution of the Jews by Momigliano 1946, but also the first four instalments (the last two planned, covering the years 1943–1945 were never released) of Spinosa 1952a: 964–78; 1952b: 1078–96; 1952c: 1604–22; 1953: 950–68.

59 Notably, Poliakov 1955, Lord Russell di Liverpool 1955. Equally remarkable is the publication of a series of articles by writer Luigi Meneghello in the journal *Officina* between December 1953 and April 1954. What began as a review of Gerald Reitlinger's *Final*

tion in 1955.⁶⁰ In Chapter Two, I discuss those early developments of Italian memory of the Holocaust and show that 'selective memory' is a more appropriate category than outright 'silence'.

While the extent to which postwar societies were aware of the magnitude of the Holocaust is debated, there is consensus in the literature on the fact that during the 1960s and the 1970s the Holocaust rose to prominence in political, cultural, and artistic debates in different countries. The Eichmann trial has been defined as a turning point in Israel's attitude toward the Holocaust,⁶¹ and in the Jewish relationship with Israel (and with the Holocaust).⁶² In the aftermath of the 1967 and 1973 wars, the Holocaust gained wide currency as a point of reference for understanding the current situation of the Jewish state in countries with numerically significant Jewish communities such as France and the United States, and became a crucial aspect in the reconfiguration of Jewish identity.

However, the similarities between different contexts must not be overstated. In the United States, a redemptive narrative of Jewish identity incorporating the Holocaust was not contested by mainstream politics and culture, and allowed for a smoother penetration of Holocaust themes into American society at large. Quite differently, in Continental Europe, the diffusion of Holocaust themes has been subject to more politically determined mediations, generated by the combination of issues of history and memory, generational conflicts, and the controversies raised by the unfolding of events in the Middle East.⁶³

Solution became a 100-page summary of the book and the first major historiographical encounter with the Holocaust for Italian readers. See Meneghello 1994.

60 The episode is narrated by Levi himself in 'Note ai testi' 1997a: 1387. The catalogue of the exhibition is in Luppi and Ruffini 2005.

61 See Segev 2000: 11; Loshitzky 2002: 16; and Zertal 2005: 92.

62 Miller 2002: 131; Yahil 1990: 8.

63 In France, *L'Humanité* and *La Croix* used Holocaust imagery to criticise Israel; see Wolf 2004: 39, 42. In West Germany, the revival of Marxism in the 1960s and 1970s resulted in a renewed interest in 'Fascism', although the 'new left' was interested more in the critique of 'bourgeois' capitalism in the present than in the analysis of Nazism; See Herf 1997: 348; Herzog 1998: 393–444.

In Italy too, domestic and international politics influenced Holocaust debates. The Eichmann trial was widely covered in the press and prompted the publication of a number of books.⁶⁴ However, as I argue in Chapter Three, it did not represent a landmark event, rather it formed part of a broader reappraisal of the Resistance which had started around the same time, and was motivated as much by domestic shifts just as by international developments. Another example of the influence exerted by international factors on the memory of the Holocaust in Italy is the impact of the Cold War, in particular in relation to leftist narratives on the Holocaust. The deterioration of relations between Israel and the Soviet Union soon after the creation of the Jewish state was followed by a wave of anti-Semitic policies in the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc.⁶⁵ As Chapter Four argues in greater detail, with the 1967 War, the gap between the international Jewish communities rallying with Israel, and the communist left (and from the 1970s on, the 'new left') reached a point of permanent rupture. In Italy, the PCI maintained an influence within Jewish circles (especially with younger generations) throughout the 1950s,⁶⁶ but could not avoid tensions with relevant sections of Italian Jewry after the 1967 and 1973 wars. One consequence of this complex picture was a downplaying of the Jewish specificity of the Holocaust (which was politically 'useless') and a displacement of emphasis on its 'universal' lesson. In practical terms, this meant that in many cases the Holocaust was appropriated for current political aims.

From the 1980s onwards, the Holocaust has progressively come to represent a growing fixture of contemporary societies. Indeed, the more it recedes in time, the more it is discussed, becoming what Levy and Sznajder call a 'cosmopolitan memory' and acquiring ever-new meanings.⁶⁷ The debates over whether the Holocaust was unique have been replaced by questions of why it is still relevant today, and how its memory should be

64 Examples are Galante Garrone 1961; Reynolds *et al.* 1961; Ludwigg 1961; *Dossier Eichmann* 1961 (with a preface by Leon Poliakov); Minerbi 1962.

65 Ro'i 2003: 22.

66 Schwarz, 2004: 97–9.

67 Levy and Sznajder 2002: 87–106.

preserved.⁶⁸ Indeed, 'memory' has become a key theme in contemporary Holocaust debates at all levels, from scholarly essays to the popular press.

Cultural artefacts such as films and television products, and the responses they elicit, influence how a society comprised for the overwhelming majority of viewers/citizens with no direct experience of the events represented 'remembers' them. This notion of remembrance as distinct from individual or group experience ultimately refers to the construction of public memory as a social and cultural process reflecting power relations within a society.⁶⁹ This phenomenon has been analysed by Brian F. Havel, whose view of public memory is that it consists of a conscious attempt by ruling elites to steer a public recollection of the past by using public law devices and statements of official policy.⁷⁰ Nonetheless, while public memory is clearly influenced by political factors and present concerns, and whilst it is to a degree constructed, it cannot simply be identified with official political statements.⁷¹ Drawing upon Paolo Jedlowski, I define 'public memory' as the memory of the public sphere, a discursive space within society where different collective memories confront each other.⁷² Since media such as films, television, and newspapers play a key role in forming public memory,⁷³ it is therefore important to investigate how the media approach historical events, in light of John Bodnar's observation that public memory is a body of ideas about the past that help to shape a society's notion not only of its past, but also of its present, and by implication of its future.⁷⁴

68 Rosenfeld 2004: 369–92; Baron, 2005: ix. See also Kansteiner 1994: 145–71.

69 Forest, Johnson, and Till 2004: 357–80; Hutton 1993: 79. For examples of works that focus on the political dimension of Holocaust memory, see Kansteiner 2002: 187–8; Kansteiner 2006: 11–25; For other examples of analyses centred on the political aspects of public memory, see Wolf 2004; Herf 1997; Cole 2000; Novick 1999: 3–7, 279–80; Clendinnen 1999: 183; Hoffmann 2004: 166; Young 1993: 1–15; Segev 2000; Pohl 2004: 19–36; Mintz, 2001: 160, 170; Carrier 2005; Zertal, 2005: 66; Koshar 1998: 10.

70 Havel 2005: 608.

71 Confino, 1997: 1394–7; Niven 2008: 427–36.

72 Jedlowski 2005: 40; Jedlowski 2002: 123–4; Jedlowski, 2001: 29–44.

73 Roediger and Wertsch 2008: 16.

74 Bodnar 1993: 15.

Studying the immediate reception of Holocaust films provides an opportunity to reflect upon the interaction between the objects of representation, and the way they are adopted, manipulated, ignored, or transformed by different public subjects according to their own interests.⁷⁵

Italian Holocaust films and television

Just as the memory of the Holocaust in Italy has yet to be explored fully, the same can be said about films and television. The study of Holocaust television, in particular, is quantitatively very limited.⁷⁶ This is perhaps surprising, if we consider that Italy is a country with notoriously low levels of literacy, and in which television has played an important 'educational' role since its inception, thus representing a prime source of historical information for large sections of the public.⁷⁷ To be fair, it is to be said that TV networks all over Europe have been very slow in opening up their archives to external researchers.⁷⁸ In Italy, while commercial networks have to this day made no provision to make their archives accessible, state broadcaster RAI has digitised large portions of its collection. As a result of this difficult access to the source material, combined perhaps with a certain suspicion by scholars to engage with a notoriously lowly medium, the film side of visual representations of the Holocaust produced in Italy has been discussed relatively more in depth.

75 Both Confino and Kansteiner stress the importance of reception in the history of memory. Confino proposes to think of it as the articulation of the relationship between the social, the cultural, and the political. See Confino 1997: 1399. Kansteiner, in turn, stresses the importance of reception in shedding light on the sociological base of historical representations, see Kansteiner 2002: 180.

76 See Marcus 2007: 64–8, 72–5, and 125–39; Perra 2008; 2010a; 2010b.

77 Ginsborg 2001: 108.

78 Kansteiner 2006: 131; Maeck 2009: 17.

Cinematic representations of the Holocaust produced in Italy have been approached from two main perspectives. The first and most common approach is the thematic one. This offers a textual analysis of films (or some of their aspects) situating them alongside other cinematic products, or isolating some of their relevant themes. For example, Annette Insdorf's study of Holocaust films pays little attention to their context of production or reception. Two works like *Pasqualino Settebellezze* (Seven Beauties, Lina Wertmüller, 1975) and *La vita è bella* (Life Is Beautiful, Roberto Benigni, 1997) separated by over twenty years, and which engendered significantly different debates in Italy, are analysed as part of the 'Holocaust laughter' sub-genre.⁷⁹ While often stimulating, this thematic approach sometimes runs the risk of relying on insufficient contextualisation of the films. This is the case of Omer Bartov's comments on Wertmüller and Benigni's works. The story of a small-time crook struggling to survive in a German camp as an Italian POW is seen by Bartov as playing with the notion of Jewish victimhood and criticised on this basis as 'disturbing'. However, as I show in Chapter Four, the theme of Jewish victimhood was relatively marginal in mid-1970s Italy, and Bartov's criticism is more a reflection of our own Holocaust-conscious position as contemporary viewers than the film's, or for that matter, those of its context of production. The same can be said about Bartov's remark that many Italian viewers of *La vita è bella* thought that Benigni himself was Jewish. This is hardly believable given Benigni's notoriety, and again it seems more likely a reflection of the reaction of viewers unfamiliar with Italian contemporary culture than a genuine opinion amongst Italian viewers.⁸⁰

A second approach analyses Italian Holocaust films by taking the filmic texts as a starting point for the discussion of Holocaust memory in Italy. This has been the method recently adopted by Millicent Marcus and Giacomo Lichtner, among others. Marcus and Lichtner have outlined the prevailing trends in Italian Holocaust films. Marcus draws upon Eric Santner's theorising of mourning as a necessary work undertaken by societies in

79 Insdorf 2003: 59–74, 276–92.

80 Bartov 2005: 68–70.

order to come to terms with the Holocaust.⁸¹ In her view, the end of the Cold War and the subsequent easing of ideological divisions within Italy's history-writing and culture, the influx of immigrants into the country, as well as the more relaxed approach to Jewish discourse within Catholicism, all favoured the development of a more open and vibrant reconsideration of the historical wound wrought upon Italy's Jewry and own sense of community.⁸² As a result of her view, the analysis of contemporary trends in Italian Holocaust cinema represents the core of her work, following the discussion of a fairly comprehensive body of earlier films. While our analyses converge in many points and our respective works can be read as complementary, there are also important differences between this book and Marcus' research, originating in part from the different methodologies employed and source-material consulted. While Marcus' analysis is primarily driven by the films themselves, which she discusses with a great degree of subtlety and significant attention to their textual nuances, my own narrative focuses less on the filmic texts, and more on the context of their reception. In other words, I am less concerned with what the films 'say' than with what opinion-formers said when discussing them. This different methodology occasionally results in different interpretations. This is the case in particular of the study of the recent miniseries *Perlasca: un eroe italiano* (Perlasca: The Courage of a Just Man, Alberto Negrin, RAI UNO, 2002). While Marcus sees in *Perlasca* a sign of 'Italy's recent willingness to confront Holocaust history', I argue in the conclusion that the uses made of the miniseries were altogether less limpid, often displaying a remarkable lack of willingness to face Fascism's responsibility for the Holocaust.⁸³

Lichtner's study sensibly argues that the majority of Italian Holocaust films too often displayed a failure to come to grips with the magnitude of the event, let alone engage with Italy's role in it. In his view, this failure led to two consequences. The first is that Italian Holocaust films display

81 For Santner's discussion of the *Trauerarbeit*, see Santner 1992: 143–54.

82 Marcus 2007: 16–20. Earlier discussions of *La vita è bella* and *La tregua* (The Truce, Francesco Rosi, 1997) can be found in Marcus 2002: 253–84 (a previous version of the chapter on *La vita è bella* is in Marcus 2000: 153–70).

83 Marcus 2007: 126.

a preference for setting their action abroad. *Kapò* is the story of a French Jew, *Il portiere di notte* (The Night Porter, Liliana Cavani, 1974) is set in Austria, *Jona che visse nella balena* (Jonah Who Lived in the Whale, Roberto Faenza, 1993) in Holland. When set in Italy, Holocaust films stress the moral indolence of Italians during and after the war, and even some of the best among them are more about complacency than persecution, more about Italy than about the Holocaust, and ultimately illustrate a tendency to refer to conventional issues such as social, economic, and even regional differences within the country. Lichtner explains this faulty dynamic of memory by pointing to the illusion of a clean slate provided by the Resistance, the high survival rate of Italian Jewry, and the absence of a catalyst such as decolonisation that might have served to encourage critical rethinking of Italy's past.⁸⁴ Although Lichtner's selection of films is at times arbitrary and the methodological rationale for his work that 'only by studying domestic films could one truly gauge the relationship between cinema as a cultural product and the society that has produced it' is based on a truism (if the relationship between films and the society that produce them is the object of study, then the analysis of domestic films is the only possible approach), his general thesis corroborates my own research and his work abounds with insightful comments about the films, some of which are also discussed here.⁸⁵

Another analysis of Italian Holocaust films and television programmes has been proposed by Carlo Saletti in a short article published in the Italian edition of *The Holocaust Encyclopaedia* edited by Walter Laqueur.⁸⁶ Saletti's chronology is not too dissimilar from the one I adopt here. After several

84 Lichtner 2008: 4–5, 84. Some of these themes were introduced in Lichtner 2005: 236–42.

85 Lichtner, 2008: 7. Lichtner never mentions the films of the 1940s and early 1950s, and particularly striking in this sense is the omission of *L'ebreo errante*, which is by all accounts a Holocaust film. Moreover, a discussion of Florestano Vancini's *La lunga notte del '43* (The Long Night of '43, 1960) would have probably allowed him to qualify his claim that Italian films of the early 1960s 'absolved contemporary political torpor by glorifying past bravery' (45).

86 Saletti 2004: 163–6.

films produced in the late 1940s (see next chapter) the Holocaust and the Resistance were marginalised. Preceded in the late 1950s by some documentaries that hardly circulated beyond film festivals, the theme of the Holocaust returned in the early 1960s (see Chapter Three), followed in the next decade by a reappraisal of Fascism, Nazism, the Resistance, and the experience of the camps (Chapter Four). From the 1980s on, the Holocaust has become a steady presence in Italian cinematography. A similar pattern is also described in terms of the introduction of Holocaust themes on Italian television, in the shape of journalistic reports, documentaries, and miniseries.

It is worth noting that almost all bibliographic references provided at the end of the volume containing Saletti's essay come from works primarily devoted to the representation of Resistance, thus implicitly highlighting a consistent inability to disentangle the place of the Holocaust from that of the Resistance (and Fascism in general) in Italian discussions.⁸⁷ Any change in the way the latter was talked about implied a mutation in approach to the former. Sometimes, as in the early 1960s, both benefited from renewed public attention (which in turn reflected broader political shifts). In the 1980s and 1990s, on the contrary, one result of the declining appeal of the Resistance was the opening of new spaces for other stories or, as Marcus puts it, the stories of 'the other'.⁸⁸

Holocaust films and reception studies

The wide chronological span of my research shows that, far from being fixed, the Holocaust has had different meanings in different times, thus underlining the need to reconstruct what the cultural products discussed

87 Cavaglion 2004: 877–8; see also Argentieri 1986: 178–203. Ciusa 1994; Crainz *et al.* 1996. A shorter and more recent presentation of the same research was published in Crainz 2000: 463–91; and in English in Crainz 1999: 124–40.

88 Marcus 2005: 323.

in this study meant when they first appeared and to try to refine our understanding of the assumptions underlying the critical debates surrounding them.⁸⁹ This focus has two consequences. The first is that, unlike Lawrence Baron's study, it has not been my priority to assess whether the reception by critics and audiences was consistent with the directors' intentions.⁹⁰ The social identity of a film is a combination of factors, of which the latter are only one element together with comments, reviews, and opinions. It is important to note that within this social identity the directors' intentions or motivation are not necessarily in a position of predominance. The second consequence is a relative agnosticism towards the issues of 'worth' and appropriateness of the films and programmes discussed, in favour of emphasising the Holocaust genre's value as a cultural phenomenon.⁹¹

A further methodological influence derives from the small body of literature entirely dedicated to the reception of significant visual products in the United States, Germany, Austria, France, and Israel.⁹² Given the lack of specific studies on Italy, these works on other national contexts represent the closest theoretical reference for my own work.⁹³ One underlying theme unifying all these works, especially those examining Continental Europe, is their emphasis on the politicisation of the Holocaust. This predominance accorded to political themes might perhaps be explained by the fact that the European press is in general terms more politically/ideologically committed than its Anglo-American counterpart. Moreover, unlike Britain or the United States, almost all European countries experienced either Nazi invasion or collaborationist regimes (or Fascism in Italy), as well as Resistance movements and in some cases civil wars during the Second World War.

89 For a similar approach, see Mintz 2001: 84, 189 n 2.

90 Baron, 2005: 8.

91 For similar approaches, see Shandler 1999: xvii; Mintz 2001: 38–9; Baron 2005: viii–ix; Picart 2004: xxv.

92 See Shandler 1997: 153–68; on the German and Austrian reception of *Holocaust*, see the special issue of *New German Critique* 1980; Collotti 1979: 83–95. For the reception of *Schindler's List* (Steven Spielberg, 1993) in Germany, Israel, and France, see Weissberg 1997: 171–92; Bresheeth 1997: 193–212; Lehrer 1997: 213–25.

93 The only exceptions are represented by Lichtner, 2008, and Cicioni 2005: 272–91.

As a consequence, Holocaust discourse in these national contexts is more immediately linked to historical and political conflicts.⁹⁴

The politicisation of memory has been particularly emphasised by Herf's studies on Germany.⁹⁵ In his article on the reception of *Holocaust* in West Germany, Herf grounds his analysis on the political divide among left, centre, and right.⁹⁶ This approach suggests that, in a country like Germany, different subject-positions and memories often imply different political/ideological affiliations, and therefore different understandings of the Holocaust and of its representations. If we add to this mix the fact that the political positioning of the German press (and, it is my contention, that of the European press in general and the Italian one in particular) is rather clear-cut, we have a good rationale for adopting the political divide as a framework of interpretation for reconstructing the place of the Holocaust in public debates.

These examples in the literature support my decision to explore Italian debates on the Holocaust by looking primarily at the press reception of films and television programmes. Reception studies necessarily have a strongly hermeneutical approach. But what is interpreted is not so much the text as the sum of meanings available in a determined context and historical period. Reception studies, then, represents a meta-interpretive approach.⁹⁷ By re-creating the products' 'discursive surround',⁹⁸ the study of their reception becomes a litmus test for the reconstruction of more general discussions about how the Holocaust has been memorialised in Italy since the end of the war.

94 As Judith Miller has written, 'there did not seem to be a "collective memory" in any country I visited. The war bitterly divided people already split by class, religion, and political ideology', see Miller 1990: 11.

95 Herf, 1997: 1.

96 Herf 1980.

97 Klinger 1998: 112.

98 Klinger 1998: 109.

Defining Holocaust films and TV programmes

This approach has also influenced the choice of works discussed in the book. The definition of Holocaust representation as a genre is far from obvious, as it ultimately leads to defining the Holocaust itself. Annette Insdorf confines the notion of Holocaust to the destruction of European Jewry carried out by the Nazis during the Second World War,⁹⁹ although this narrow definition is belied by the much broader variety of films she discusses. Ilan Avisar explicitly states that truthful accounts of the Third Reich and the Final Solution have the moral obligation to present the Jews as the 'main and ultimate targets of Nazi atrocities.'¹⁰⁰ Relying on Raul Hilberg's authoritative framework of interpretation, Judith Doneson has defined Holocaust films as those describing the incremental historical process of destruction of the European Jews from the first laws passed in 1933 to the liberation of the concentration camps in 1945 and beyond, to incorporate films influenced by the Holocaust, although not about it.¹⁰¹ Finally, Baron's view of the Third Reich as a 'racial state' leads him to open the definition of Holocaust films to include movies about the Euthanasia program and the persecution of homosexuals and gypsies.¹⁰²

In other words, the definition of Holocaust films (or TV products) needs a qualification. My own criterion of choice is a combination of different factors. Works like *Kapò*, *L'ebreo errante*, *La vita è bella*, the TV miniseries *Holocaust*, *Il giardino dei Finzi Contini* ('The Garden of the Finzi-Continis, Vittorio De Sica, 1970), and *L'oro di Roma* ('The Gold of Rome, Carlo Lizzani, 1961), representing the persecution of Jews before deportation or in the camps, would all fit into even the most restrictive definition of Holocaust film. But this book also discusses products that could be defined as Holocaust films only in a broad sense. Among them are

99 Insdorf 2003: xvi.

100 Avisar 1988: 90.

101 Doneson 2002: 6–7.

102 Baron 2005: 12.

movies like *La caduta degli dei* ('The Damned, Luchino Visconti, 1969), *Il portiere di notte*, and *Pasqualino Settebellezze*, where the Holocaust is marginal. Others, like *Tutti a casa* ('Everybody Go Home, Luigi Comencini, 1960), *Rappresaglia* ('Massacre in Rome, George Pan Cosmatos, 1973), and *Il Generale della Rovere* ('General della Rovere, Roberto Rossellini, 1959), address the theme of persecution as a subtext of narratives mainly centred on other subjects. The decision to include these films (and others) is due to the fact that their reception is indicative of strands of Holocaust debates circulating in Italy at the time of their release.

Two final qualifications need to be made. The first is that, given the book's focus on one national context, the inclusion of 'asymmetrical' comparisons with other national contexts guards against perceiving phenomena that belong to a broader scale as local peculiarities, while at the same time highlighting truly original elements.¹⁰³ The second is that this is a study of the reception of Holocaust films and television programmes as a way of looking at broader public debates on the Holocaust in Italy. For this reason, there is no systematic analysis of the Jewish press.¹⁰⁴

103 I borrow the notion of 'asymmetrical comparisons' from Jürgen Kocka, who defines them as those approaches that 'investigate one case carefully while limiting themselves to a mere sketch of the other case(s) which serve(s) as comparative reference point(s)', see Kocka 1999: 40. For a discussion of some of the risks of non-comparative histories, see Lorenz 1999: 25–39.

104 On the elaboration of Holocaust memory by Italian Jewry, see Schwarz 2004; Sarfatti 1998; Toscano 1985–87: 293–325.

CHAPTER TWO

Early Postwar Debates: Between Catholicism and Resistance

News of the crimes perpetrated by the Nazis in the camps reached Italy in the chaotic aftermath of the Second World War. The words used in the press to describe those events were the first attempts to confer them with a meaning and narrative form. Guri Schwarz has defined the immediate postwar period as exceptionally important for the construction of an Italian memory of the Holocaust, because the stereotypes put forward at this time influenced the culture and mentality on the issue for years to come.¹ As noted in the previous chapter, the disastrous outcome of the war and the end of the fascist regime required that the Republic of Italy be distanced from the country's recent past as much as possible.² The Resistance and the alleged inbuilt non-racism and antifascism of Christian Italy were instrumental in this process.³ Moreover, since responses to cataclysms rarely acknowledge their qualitative difference, but often centre on familiar frameworks that reinforce existing beliefs,⁴ Catholicism and the ethics of the Resistance – the two belief systems that emerged as dominant in Italy in the immediate aftermath of the war – were the two paradigms most often used to describe and signify the Holocaust.⁵ The extermination of the Jews was incorporated into these two narratives. One result of this combination

¹ Schwarz 2004: 112–15.

² Focardi 2005: 4–7.

³ On the narratives put forward in the immediate postwar, see Cavazza 2001.

⁴ Baron 2003: 63; Winter 1995: 5.

⁵ The centrality of these two paradigms in postwar Italy's politics of memory is also at the centre of Poggiolini 2002.

of factors was a widespread lack of emphasis on Italy's participation in the persecution and destruction of the Jews in Italy.

These characteristics emerge from the analysis of how the press in liberated Italy presented deportation to its readers in 1945. Although lacking background information on the camps' system and their structures, news coverage of deportation was episodic but not in short supply.⁶ The Jewish experience of deportation did not stand out as different in qualitative terms from that of other groups, but nor was it repressed.⁷ More noteworthy in these early accounts is the paucity of references to the existence of camps operating within the Italian borders, and to fascist and Italian complicities.⁸ While references to Italy were scarce, accounts set in Mauthausen, Buchenwald, Dachau, and to a lesser extent Auschwitz, proliferated.

While the Holocaust was presented in the vast majority of cases as a distant foreign event, the description of its victims relied on pre-established categories. In the majority of cases, the deportees were conflated with political prisoners.⁹ This was also true of the relatively extensive body of memoirs written and published (often with very little circulation) in the years between 1945 and 1947. The 55 texts (of which 12 were by or about Jewish deportees, 19 about political deportees, and 11 about military internees) often strived to present deportation as 'resistance truncated.'¹⁰ A closer look at the memoirs written by Jewish male survivors shows that, with the notable exception of Primo Levi, they generally emphasised political militancy as a way to legitimise their experience of deportation.¹¹ Anna

6 Fantini 2005: 332. See also Matard-Bonucci 1999: 106.

7 Italy was not peculiar from this point of view. On the United States, see Shandler 1999: 23.

8 Fantini 2005: 95 n 86, 103. A significant exception was represented by *Avanti!*, which saw an equivalence between Nazi and fascist culpability for the establishment in Italy of camps for political and Jewish prisoners; see 'La sorte degli italiani nei campi di concentramento', *Avanti!* (4 May 1945): 2. See also La Rovere 2007: 119–20.

9 In *Corriere d'informazione*, we read about the extermination of 'four million allied citizens', while *La Nazione del Popolo* defined the Jews as 'political racial deportees'; see Fantini 2005: 85, 147.

10 Gordon 2000: 34.

11 Consonni 2005: 184.

Rossi-Doria has attributed this phenomenon to the fact that political deportees could be assimilated to the partisans more easily than Jews or military prisoners. The political deportee was not only a victim, but also a fighter, and was therefore capable of legitimately representing the struggle for liberation.¹²

Such a thesis is borne out in the communist press. *L'Unità* constructed its narrative about deportation by separating 'comrades', who were not deprived of their human quality in virtue of their political faith, from the far less clearly defined group of non-political prisoners.¹³ The Catholic papers *Avvenire d'Italia*, *Il Popolo*, and *Alto Adige*, in turn, eulogised Catholic victims of the camps as saintly embodiments of true Christian spirit, and described the entire system of the camps as a strenuous challenge that ultimately proved the validity of Christian precepts.¹⁴ In general terms, the themes introduced by newspapers in their first encounter with deportation, such as the emphasis on the Resistance, the use of a Catholic framework for understanding the camps, and silence over the Italy-related side of the Holocaust, were mirrored in the films produced in successive years, and reverberated in Italian debates for many years.

This chapter discusses films released (and one which did not make it beyond the screenwriting stage) in Italy between the end of the 1940s and the early 1950s, and which are thus representative of very early cinematic reflections on recent events. Through what they show and their omissions, these films offer an insight into the ways the Holocaust was construed in the Italian context in those years. These films are *Il monastero di Santa Chiara – Napoli ha fatto un sogno* ('The Monastery of Saint Clare – Naples Has Made a Dream, Mario Sequi, 1949), *L'ebreo errante, Il grido della terra* ('The Cry of the Land, Duilio Coletti, 1949), and the script of *I fidanzati* ('The Fiancées, written by Vasco Pratolini and Franco Zeffirelli and published in 1953).

12 Rossi-Doria 1998: 38.

13 A similar emphasis on political deportees can be found in the PSI *Avanti!*, although the newspaper also included more than passing references to Jewish sufferings, see Fantini 2005: 267–73.

14 Fantini 2005: 55–9.

The films discussed in this chapter are not well known and are seldom cited by scholars.¹⁵ Nor were they widely discussed upon release. This was partly due to practical reasons. In the immediate postwar period paper continued to be rationed, and newspapers often consisted of one to two sheets only. Moreover, the films that are object of this chapter were not highbrow productions demanding careful scrutiny by commentators. For example, many newspapers failed to mention the release of *L'ebreo errante* because the small space usually reserved for film reviews was taken up by *Monsieur Verdoux* (Charles Chaplin, 1947), which premiered in Italy at the same time. These apparently straightforward motivations explain the lack of coverage of these films better than hypothetical decisions consciously taken by newspapers and journals to silence possible sources of controversy. In fact, none of these films touched upon the real sore spot of Italian Holocaust memory: *L'ebreo errante* and *Il grido della terra* were set abroad and their plots had little or no connection to Italy, while the film version of *Febbre di vivere* (Eager to Live, Claudio Gora, 1953) expunged any reference to Italian collaboration with the Nazis. *Ifidanzati*, the only one that directly dealt with the theme of the persecution of Jews in fascist Italy, was never made.¹⁶ In other words, the connections between Italy and the Holocaust had already been passed over in silence before these films were released.

These little known films were preceded by another far more renowned work, Roberto Rossellini's *Paisà* (Paisan, 1946). *Paisà* reconstructs in six separate episodes the Allies' march towards North of Italy, from the shores of Sicily to the Po valley. The fifth episode of the film is a lightly-touched interlude positioned between the frantic episode set in Florence and the film's final and tragic chapter. It is set in a monastery in the Apennines, and documents the encounter between a group of local Franciscan friars and three American chaplains – one Catholic, one Lutheran, and one Jewish. The episode is centred on the clash between different religions, and it ends

15 *L'ebreo errante* is listed in Picart 2004: 110–11. Neither Insdorf 2003 nor Avisar 1988 mention any of them; however, some are discussed in Marcus 2007: 30–5.

16 For some preliminary notes on State and market censorship in 1950s Italy, see Cooke 2005.

with the friars fasting in order that God may redeem the souls of the two non-Catholic chaplains. The episode's ending is ambiguous. When the American captain, who is clearly conversant with Italian culture, realises why the friars are fasting, he addresses them with an enigmatic speech. He stresses the otherworldly peacefulness of the place, a respite from the horrors of the war, and eulogises the lesson of simplicity, humility, and pure faith imparted by the friars.

This vignette has been interpreted both as sharing a view of Catholicism sympathetic towards the friars' ambiguous messages of evangelical brotherhood and universal love,¹⁷ and as a critique of the inadequateness of that age-old culture to meet the demands of the present.¹⁸ Such an explicit approach to religious and cultural difference was a novelty for Italian screens.¹⁹ In particular, on the basis of its unambiguous attempt to address the theme of Jewish otherness, *Paisà* can be seen as the first important post-Holocaust film made in Italy, and an early contribution to the debate on the status of Jewish presence in postwar culture and society.

Il monastero di Santa Chiara and L'ebreo errante

Racial persecution was the subject of one poorly distributed feature film that went on limited theatrical release, mainly in the South, in 1949; *Il monastero di Santa Chiara – Napoli ha fatto un sogno* is set in occupied Naples and follows the story of a Jewish vaudeville singer, Ester Di Veroli. Ester has a (very unlikely on historical grounds) romantic liaison with SS officer Rudolph Stassen, who hides her in a convent. The love story

17 Bondanella 1993: 78–80; Wagstaff 2007: 217–18 and 237. The persistence of 'benign' forms of prejudice in many sectors of Italian society in the immediate postwar is an established fact: for a discussion of some problematic liberal positions, see Finzi 2006.

18 Marcus 2002: 32.

19 Fink 1999: 86.

is uncovered by the other Germans, and Rudolph commits suicide. As a result, Ester is arrested, only to be liberated by the Allies soon thereafter. A further twist finds her caught up in an ambush set up by fugitive Nazis and shot down by her rival Greta Muller, who also vied for Rudolph's love and blamed Ester for his death.

Despite a cameo from the established writer Alberto Moravia, the film was largely ignored by critics, and was torn apart by the few reviews received.²⁰ As Marcus notes, the film blends melodrama and *sceneggiata* (popular plays on sentimental stories told with frequent musical interludes). Music plays an important role in *Il monastero di Santa Chiara*. Early in the film, a provocatively-dressed and heavily made-up Ester sings *Lili Marlene* to a flirtatious male audience composed of Nazi officers and Neapolitans. Towards the end of the movie, we see her again on stage, this time modestly dressed and wearing no make-up, singing *Monastero di Santa Chiara*, a song celebrating the virtues of Naples, in front of an admiring audience. The function of these two songs is clear, as they symbolise the debasement and successive regeneration of the city after German occupation. However, a third song, strategically dividing the film in two halves, points at a personal, spiritual, and religious regeneration involving Ester. The convent, in which Ester is hiding, is hit in an Allied air raid. Terrorised, Ester wanders around the building, until she overhears a group of nuns singing Schubert's *Ave Maria*. In the contrast between the nuns' peace and Ester's turmoil, underlined by the imposing presence in the frame of an image of Christ on a cross, we witness a scene that 'has all the trappings of an epiphany.'²¹ At the end of the film, the same melody is used to highlight Ester's conversion *in articulo mortis*.

Music, then signposts key passages in the film. The conversion of the city from a site of moral debauchery under occupation to one of reverence is replicated by that of Ester's conversion to Catholicism. These two conversions feed and complement each other. For this reason, Ester's Jewish

origin is more than 'a mere plot device.'²² It is a pillar of the film's structure – regeneration and spiritual salvation are only possible within Catholicism: *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*.

A similar message is put forward in another, much more successful film. *L'ebreo errante* went on general release in February 1948. As the title suggests, it was an adaptation to the post-Holocaust world of the medieval legend representing the Jews as cursed. Already centuries old when first put on paper in the seventh century, this legend acquired multiple symbolic values in a variety of contexts.²³ In Germany, the wandering Jew came to be known in the eighteenth century as Ahasverus, or *der ewige Jude*, and was described as a torn and often barefoot old man. This is how the protagonist Matteo Blumenthal is presented in the opening scenes of *L'ebreo errante*. But the film's most immediate and acknowledged reference is Eugène Sue's popular novel *Le juif errant*, published in the mid-1800s. In the nineteenth century, the figure of the wandering Jew had come to be read not only in exclusively negative terms, but also as a rebel against tyranny, a symbol of human suffering, and a Romantic sinner in search of redemption. Sue's novel partook of this re-evaluation of the legend, presenting the Jew as the champion of the oppressed. However, as noted by George Mosse, for the most part the ancient legend retained its original form, symbolising the curse against the Jews, whose restlessness also came to be used as a metaphor for modern desolation, and became part and parcel of the growing anti-Semitic campaign.²⁴

The film preserves an ambiguous image of the wandering Jew. The action starts in Frankfurt in 1935, where Matteo seeks advice from renowned scientist Israel Epstein to relieve him of his metaphysical pain. Matteo explains the origin of his curse to the professor, and a long flashback takes viewers to ancient Jerusalem. There, Matteo is a wealthy merchant driven from the temple by Jesus. As a result, Matteo not only rejects Jesus, but taunts him on the Via Dolorosa. There, Jesus spells his curse: 'my walk is

20 A sample of such reviews is in Bernardini 1999: 23–4.

21 Marcus 2007: 35.

22 Marcus 2007: 34.

23 Calimani 2002: 7–10.

24 Mosse 2000: 196.

short now, but you will walk for centuries and centuries until the truth will befall upon you.' Deserted by everyone, and having rejected his own coreligionists, Matteo is condemned to wander eternally, indifferent to the fate of the Jews and unscathed by their suffering over the centuries. The film then moves back to Paris in 1940. There, Matteo undergoes a transformation; moved by his love for professor Epstein's virtuous niece Esther, he willingly agrees to follow the local Jews on the trains to deportation. In the camp, Matteo leads a revolt and escapes. However, when informed of the Nazis' intention to kill a hundred fellow prisoners if he doesn't hand himself over to the guards, Matteo decides to return to the camp and face execution as a hero. His final words 'my walk is over' establish a clear parallel with Jesus' earlier pronouncement, thus signalling his atonement and perhaps conversion.²⁵ The message is further strengthened by a final written inscription that reads: 'thus, the sacrifice was made, for the love of all mankind, as it was in the word of the Lord. And a new hope lightened the hearts of a people which an implacable fanaticism wanted to erase from the earth.'

Press response to the theological theme

L'ebreo errante was the seventh most popular Italian film of the 1947–1948 season, grossing 219 million Lire.²⁶ Moreover, the story writer Gian Battista Angioletti was awarded a Special Golden Ribbon (a prize awarded by the Italian National Union of Film Journalists) for the 'moral meaning' of the story.²⁷ The director Goffredo Alessandrini had been a leading film-maker

25 Similar fictionalised accounts had circulated since the immediate postwar. An example is Leopoldo Sofisti, 'L'angelo di se stesso', *Alto Adige* (24 December 1945): 3, where a prisoner converts to Catholicism in *articulo mortis* after an escape attempt.

26 'Statistiche cinematografiche, culturali e dei consumi': 609.

27 'Nastri 1947/1948' n.d.

during Fascism, creator of some of the most accomplished propaganda films of the regime. Two of them in particular, *Cavalleria* (Cavalry, 1936) and *Luciano Serra pilota* (Luciano Serra, Pilot, 1938), had used the theme of male sacrifice to glorify the fascist cult of heroism and virility.²⁸ The same theme is also at the centre of *L'ebreo errante*, thus establishing a certain aesthetic continuity with the recent past and transfiguring part of the imaginary absorbed during the regime to the needs of a postwar anti-Nazi story.²⁹ The film is one of the earliest attempts to represent the concentration camps, not just in Italian cinema but also in European cinema, thus validating Graham Bartram's claim (expressed in relation to other films) that the lack of a sense of national complicity in the Holocaust allowed Italian filmmakers to depict *l'univers concentrationnaire* with a relative degree of liberty.³⁰

L'ebreo errante has nonetheless been overlooked in the literature on filmic representations of the Holocaust.³¹ It should also be said that the film generated little debate upon release. The limited space available in newspapers was more often taken up by the approaching general elections, which were unanimously perceived as a watershed in Italian history.³² Nonetheless, the theological interpretation of the Holocaust did not go completely uncontested in the limited number of reviews. Christian imagery is indeed quite explicit. Besides a number of visual references, such as when the Christ-like corpse of a camp prisoner is trailed by a hand-cart between two lines of working Jewish prisoners, this symbolism informs the whole narrative of the film. As noted by Marcus, the occurrence of miracles is associated with processes of redemption to Christian values.³³

28 Brunetta 2001a: 144–5.

29 I borrow this specific point from Fogu 2006: 150. On the aesthetic continuities between Fascism and the postwar years, see Ben-Ghiat 1999.

30 Bartram 1996: 25.

31 Fink 1999: 89. It is an almost completely forgotten film in Italy, too, although it has been recently mentioned in Marcus 2007: 30–2; Saletti 2004: 163; Gaetani 2006: 78–82.

32 On the 1948 elections, see Ventresca 2004.

33 Marcus 2007: 31.

Thus, when Matteo's son Davide is bitten by a viper in Jerusalem, his wife Sara (who has joined the new creed) sets out to meet Jesus and ask him to save her son, but is stopped by her husband. By the same token, Professor Epstein prophesises that only the miracle of observing the commandment to 'love thy neighbour' would save Matteo, but again the wandering Jew is unmoved by the appeal. It is only through the catalyst of Esther that Matteo finally resolves to repent and share the fate of the other Jews. After the escape from the camp, he explicitly tells Esther that his transformation is miraculous. He finally enacts his own *imitatio Christi*, following the teaching prophesised by Professor Epstein to its extreme consequence.

Milan's *Nuovo Corriere della Sera* criticised the mixture of religious symbols and supposed realism in the representation of the camps. The reviewer Arturo Lanocita condemned the film's thesis that the suffering of Jews in the Holocaust redeemed them from their ancient sin, and 'that Nazi persecution was the chastisement for one offence'.³⁴ While Lanocita censored the film's crude theological message, another review took it for granted. In an article replete with anti-Jewish expressions, the cinema journal *Film* subscribed to the film's view that the only way to salvation was through conversion. For this reason, the review criticised the fact that Matteo asked for help from Professor Epstein as untenable because, according to the reviewer, since Epstein himself was a Jew, he could not help Matteo.³⁵ The film was not reviewed substantially in the Catholic official press. The exception was a very short comment published in *L'Osservatore Romano*, which unenthusiastically defined the first half set in Jerusalem as rhetorical and longwinded, and the whole film as only suitable for adults because it included scenes of graphic violence.³⁶

34 Lan [Arturo Lanocita], 'L'ebreo errante – Singapore', *Nuovo Corriere della Sera* (8 February 1948): 2.

35 Felice 1948.

36 Vice, 'Prime visioni', *L'Osservatore Romano* (13 March 1948): 2.

The persistence of traditional prejudices

L'ebreo errante and aspects of its reception display a persistence of forms of Catholic pre-Vatican Council II anti-Jewish prejudice. Such prejudice had a long and established tradition, originating from at least the second century with the inception of supersessionism, represented by the self-definition of the Church as the '*verus Israel*',³⁷ extending itself through the centuries, into nineteenth- and twentieth-century Italian culture.³⁸ *L'ebreo errante* represents the persistence, presumably unconscious, of approaches to Judaism still situating themselves in a conversionist horizon after the war, thus confirming the tendency in the aftermath of the war to conceptualise the events of the Holocaust within pre-existing frameworks. In the film, established anti-Jewish stereotypes coexist with an early acknowledgement of the devastating impact of the Holocaust. *L'ebreo errante* sheds a light on early postwar responses to the Holocaust in sections of Italian culture receptive to the influence of Catholicism. Unsurprisingly, the film's lack of a serious rethinking of the approach to Judaism merely parallels a more general failure to do so by institutional Catholicism and by its press,³⁹ trapped between the persistence of past attitudes and an all-encompassing focus on the Church's 'uncompromising battle for supremacy against the secularism and anti-clericalism of the left' characterising the Cold War years.⁴⁰

La Nuova Stampa praised the film's representation of the camps and its message of 'redemption through sufferings sustained by the Jewish people in

37 Kessler and Wenborn 2005: 413–14; Stefani 2004: 69–107.

38 The Jesuit journal *La Civiltà Cattolica* played an important role in the modern articulation of Catholic anti-Judaism. See Dahl 2003; Taradel and Raggi 2000. See also Moro 2002: 56. Miccoli 1997: 1398 sees the 1870s as the turning point in the Catholic Church's sanctioning of radical anti-Jewish prejudice. On the presence of religious-influenced prejudice in early twentieth-century Italy, see Feinstein 2004; Moro 2008b; Moro 1988.

39 See Consonni 2006; Marrus 2006. See also Moro 2008a: 51.

40 Consonni 2006: 23.

the name of a high ideal of human solidarity'⁴¹ as very effective. *L'Unità*, in turn, completely overlooked the religious theme and focused instead on the Resistance. For the communist newspaper, the film's main characters were Professor Epstein and Esther, and the peak of the narrative came with the 'revolt organised by a group of Polish patriots, led by Matteo,'⁴² a comment that did not extend to informing readers about Matteo's identity. In other words, *l'Unità* saw the religious theme as irrelevant for its readership, and transformed an overtly Catholic film about the persecution of the Jews, into a Resistance film with Polish 'patriots' as protagonists.

The anti-Jewish undertones pervading *L'ebreo errante* that would disturb many of today's viewers were not a relevant issue at the time, thus highlighting an aspect of the early reception of Holocaust themes not just in Italy, but also abroad. For example, *Variety* defined the film as crisply directed and with strong potential for export success in the United States, noting that the 'symbolical angle' which mixed legend with reality was *L'ebreo errante*'s 'unique (and minor) defect.'⁴³

L'ebreo errante's interpretation of the Holocaust was not an isolated episode, as shown by Diego Fabbri's play *Processo a Gesù* (The Trial of Jesus). The play was written between 1952 and 1954; it was put on stage and published for the first time in 1955, and was later revised after the Second Vatican Council.⁴⁴ It is the story of a group of post-Holocaust Jews who gather, after a twelve-year break, to re-examine the trial of Jesus in front of an audience of Christians. The author Diego Fabbri was an important, if unorthodox, figure in Italian Catholic culture. Although unaffiliated to any party, he was animated by a form of Catholicism committed to social justice and moral integrity, which he transfused into his work for cinema (he collaborated with Rossellini on many of his films, including *Il Generale*

41 'Al Lux: *L'ebreo errante* di G. Alessandrini', *La Nuova Stampa* (27 February 1948): 2.

42 'L'ebreo errante', *l'Unità* (31 January 1948): 2.

43 'L'ebreo errante (The Wandering Jew)', *Variety* (14 April 1948).

44 The play can be read in Fabbri 1984. An English-language version, adapted from Fabbri's play was published with the less charged title of 'Between Two Thieves' in Le Roy 1959.

della Rovere discussed in the next chapter) and as a playwright. *Processo a Gesù* is Fabbri's most widely known work, and it was performed many times over the years. The play was adapted for television twice, the first time in 1963 under the direction of Sandro Bolchi (10 May, Programma Nazionale, 21.05), and the second time in 1968 (12 and 13 April, Programma Nazionale, 14.50), directed by Gianfranco Bettetini. The following pages will discuss the 1968 broadcast, preserved in the RAI archives. Although the telecast occurred much later than the period examined in this chapter, the thematic affinity with *L'ebreo errante* and the date of production of the original text justify its inclusion in this section.

The title of the play is somewhat misleading; it is not so much Jesus but the surviving Jews to be put on trial. It is they who re-enact the trial in attempt to work through and wash away their millennial guilt.⁴⁵ The play is divided into two acts and an interlude. In the first part the Jews debate whether Jesus was innocent or guilty according to Jewish law of the time. The Holocaust theme is introduced early on in the play, when the leader of the group Elia explains that one of them is missing. Daniele, Elia's son-in-law, died in the camps, and his chair is left empty. In the interlude we learn that Daniele's wife Sara had an affair with Davide, who is also a member of the jury. It was Davide who denounced Daniele to the Nazis. But Daniele had not been tipped off simply out of rivalry. Daniele had convinced himself that Christ was the saviour, and had decided to announce his conversion during a performance of the trial, but was arrested by the Nazis that same day. Thus, in the play Daniele is the only figure to have redeemed himself by sacrificing his own life. However, he does so not for his Jewish origin, but on the contrary for his conversion to Christianity. In the reversal of history offered by Fabbri's text, the Jew Davide and 'Christ's enemies' (i.e. the Nazis) team up to prevent the world from hearing Daniele's announcement of the Gospel.

In the second act, contributions from the audience soon transform the play into a discussion about Christians' own failure to change the world according to the teaching of Christ. Elia sums up the meaning of the play by

45 See Gatt-Rutter 1999: 550.

saying that with the performance of the trial their suffering has come to an end, and that Jesus represents the only hope of regeneration for humankind. The conclusion is that, purged of their guilt by the trial, Jews partake of the new Covenant. Just as in Alessandrini's film, *Processo a Gesù* acknowledges the Holocaust as a world-historical event, but frames it within a traditional conversionist framework of interpretation.

Ifidanzati

L'ebreo errante was the only early postwar Italian film that directly tackled the Holocaust. Its success can be explained as a result of it being a well-directed 'Resistance melodrama [*melò resistenziale*].'⁴⁶ When the film was made and released (1947–early 1948), the Resistance was enjoying its last spell of popularity. After the DC victory in the 1948 elections, the 'ecumenical' rhetoric of the Resistance became increasingly untenable, while the DC became more responsive to appeals coming from the right for a national 'pacification' against totalitarianism.⁴⁷ Although it is not possible to assess whether viewers responded more favourably to the love story between Matteo and Esther, the redemptive 'message', or the Resistance theme, one thing is clear: the Holocaust setting did not engender any controversy, nor did it damage the film's commercial potential.

The representation of events linked with the persecution of the Jews on Italian soil would probably have been a greater source of controversy. This is indirectly shown by the filmic adaptation of Leopoldo Trieste's drama *Cronaca*.⁴⁸ The play was the story of two Italian friends, one of whom (Massimo) denounced the other (Daniele, a Jew) to the Nazis. Having survived the concentration camp, Daniele seeks revenge but eventually

gives up this pursuit, and opts to marry Lucia (a Jew herself), the only figure capable of understanding his pain. This essential aspect of the plot (which raised questions about the behaviour of Italians during the Nazi occupation, and was entirely dedicated to the analysis of certain facets of the 'grey zone') was completely left out in the play's filmic adaptation *Febbre di vivere*. In the film Daniele is not a Jew, and he is denounced by Massimo for more 'private' reasons (illicit profits made during the war). As noted by one of the few reviewers to take notice of the film, in 1953 questioning the war-time behaviour of Italians who readily denounced their fellow countrymen under the cover of racial persecution, was not a priority for the director and the screenwriters,⁴⁹ and the film's potential for controversy was diffused.

Another film project in 1953 was less successful. The script written by Vasco Pratolini and Franco Zeffirelli for a film that should have been entitled *Ifidanzati* was never produced.⁵⁰ Based on a short novella written by Pratolini,⁵¹ it is the story, set in 1939 Florence, of Bruno (a good-hearted albeit naïve and apolitical young worker) and Vanda (a middle-class Jewish girl). The romance between the two fiancées is doomed by the racial laws, enforced in earnest by authorities and not opposed by the populace, who progressively push Vanda and her family to the margins of society. At the end of the script Vanda, who has never told Bruno of her Jewish origin, commits suicide thus sacrificing herself in order to avoid compromising him.

In the foreword to the script, Pratolini explained the script's failure to find financial backing by stating that it was an untimely tragic love story with an un-happy ending involving a Jewish girl during the war ('a controversial and unpleasant subject').⁵² This is certainly true. By any standards the early 1950s were the period during which public memory of antifascism, the Resistance, fascist crimes including the persecution of Italy's Jews

46 Toffetti 2003: 273.

47 See Focardi 2005: 28–32; Fogu 2006: 152–3.

48 Trieste 1947.

49 Castello 1953: 181. See also Aristarco 1953.

50 The screenplay was published in four instalments in the cinema journal *Cinema nuovo*. See Pratolini and Zeffirelli 1954a; 1954b; 1954c; 1954d.

51 The 1947 novella 'Vanda' is republished in Pratolini 1993.

52 Pratolini and Zeffirelli 1953a: 277.

and the Holocaust, was at its lowest.⁵³ The script presented an indictment against the fascist regime and the pettiness and indolence of sections of Italian society sufficient to make it unappealing to many. For example, at one point in the script a woman living nearby the house where Vanda and her parents live, calls them 'filthy Jews' while her husband explicitly says that he does not want to get involved. In a later scene, when Vanda's parents are arrested by the police, the same neighbour now screams to let them go, as they are honest people and their origins do not matter, while her husband repeats to her that he does not want to get involved. These bystanders, with their mixture of prejudice, indifference, and belated remorse, embody the gamut of many non-Jewish Italians' passivity vis-à-vis persecution, and represent the strongest charge against indifference of the whole script. Thus, although the novella and the script leant on the notion of Jewish female sacrifice made in order to protect the Christian male with rather problematic metaphoric ramifications (but that was nonetheless used in a successive film like *L'oro di Roma*), the film would nonetheless have made an important contribution towards facing unpleasant aspects of recent Italian history. Pratolini's novella *Vanda* was eventually brought to the screen in the 1973 film *Diario di un italiano* (Diary of an Italian, Sergio Capogna, 1973).

Innocence and victimhood

Thus, the picture we have of Italian representations of the Holocaust in the immediate postwar is a complex one. It was not simply a case of total silence. By means of the aesthetic and narrative devices fashionable at the time, Holocaust-related themes were projected onto the silver screen in the late 1940s. What was really passed over in silence in Italian cinema during this period was the representation of the Holocaust as an event that

53 See Focardi 2005: 31.

also involved Italians as perpetrators. The silence regarding this aspect in Italian public debate and cinema was not so much the result of traumatic shock, but the product of more or less consciously selective public memory constructs.

The main concern of the antifascist *Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale* (National Liberation Committee, CLN) in the final stages of the war was to spare the country from overly harsh conditions in the peace treaty with the Allies. The best way to plead Italy's cause was to remark upon, and emphasise, the differences firstly with Germany, and secondly with Fascism. An example of the dominant discourse of the time is Gaetano Salvemini's opposition between the 'inborn sense of humanity' of Italian soldiers, and the 'cold, mechanical brutality' of the 'uncivilised and barbarian Teutonic robot'.⁵⁴ It was claimed that this difference was made manifest by the different conduct adopted by Italian and German soldiers and civilians during the war. Italian soldiers were described as dutiful but exempt from any enthusiasm, unlike their German allies. It was further claimed that this contrast had been borne out by the allegedly mild occupations in the Balkans and in Greece.⁵⁵ Furthermore, Italians proved their real antifascist feelings as soon as they were given the opportunity, with the collapse of the fascist regime.

This mythical narration (dryly defined by Donald Sassoon as a fairy-tale-like construction)⁵⁶ met with the agreement of the Allies (interested in influencing the domestic front)⁵⁷ and was perpetuated by all antifascist forces. For many years therefore it continued to exert a strong influence on public memory of the war. According to this interpretation, Italians had been brought to war against their will by Mussolini's regime, but fought their 'real' war in 1943–5.⁵⁸ Corrado Alvaro's description of Italy as a 'poor

54 Gaetano Salvemini and Giorgio La Piana, *La sorte dell'Italia* (Rome: Edizioni U, 1945), quoted in Focardi 2001: 94.

55 See Focardi and Klinkhammer 2004; Santarelli 2004.

56 Sassoon 2001: 24.

57 On the role played by the Allies in the development of events in the immediate postwar in Italy, see Battini 2003.

58 Focardi 2005: 12–13.

lamb, offered up in holocaust, which fights to defend itself the best it can' captures the spirit of times.⁵⁹ As Ruth Ben-Ghiat has written, the catastrophic outcome of the war, the humiliation of being invaded by its own ally, and the sufferings implied by this occupation, paved the way for a widespread culture of victimhood and a narrative of redemptive Resistance.⁶⁰

Defining Germany as the epitome of racial hatred and genocide (in opposition to Italians' inbuilt humanism) encouraged the consolidation of the myth of the 'good Italians' as a social body fundamentally unaltered after two decades of fascist regime. It also encouraged the adoption in public discussion of Benedetto Croce's interpretation of Fascism as a viral parenthesis in an otherwise healthy liberal body.⁶¹ The impact of this approach excused Italians from dealing with their involvement with the regime and, with regard to the persecution of the Jews in Italy, resulted in downplaying the role played by native components in fascist anti-Semitism.⁶²

This narrative was integrated with another powerful theme that emphasised the Resistance as a 'second Risorgimento'.⁶³ The Resistance narrative, while conferring redemptive 'meaning' to the sufferings of the war, engulfed all other experiences, including the Holocaust. Since the symbol of the new Italy in the immediate postwar was the freedom fighter, all other subjects (including Jews) were either lumped together in the morally negative category of *attendismo* (wait-and-see policy), or included in the ranks of the Resistance.⁶⁴ In the case of Jews this implied belittling the specificity of their persecution.⁶⁵

59 Corrado Alvaro, *L'Italia rinunzia?* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1986), p. 40 referenced in Ben-Ghiat 1999: 84.

60 Ben-Ghiat 2001b: 256.

61 Croce 1998. Croce's article was first published in *Giornale* (of Naples) (29 October 1944).

62 Österberg 2006: 24.

63 Pavone 1995: 50–8.

64 Contini, Gribaudi and Pezzino 2002: 795.

65 This aspect is far from being exclusively Italian. In postwar France, no political party claimed a different status for racial deportation. Jewish organisations themselves did not want to stand apart from other victims, see Wieviorka 1992: 141–58.

This helps explain why significant sections of Italian Jewry did not wish to be perceived as separate from other victims of Nazism and Fascism. While the majority of Italian Jews started slowly but permanently to define their identities in relation to the persecutions suffered,⁶⁶ literary scholar and heterodox PCI sympathiser Giacomo Debenedetti claimed the right for Jews to have the wrongs suffered redressed by their re-assimilation with other citizens, and the victims of the Holocaust to be commemorated as Resistance fighters.⁶⁷ The same view was also shared by Silvia Lombroso, who wrote in her diary that Jewish suffering was 'absorbed and summed up by that of the homeland'.⁶⁸

Beyond individual examples, Jewish narratives of the war frequently followed hegemonic 'national' constructions. One of the very first analyses of the Holocaust in Italy was the book *Storia tragica e grottesca del regime fascista* (Tragic and Grotesque History of the Fascist Regime) by Jewish lawyer Eucardio Momigliano, published in 1946. In his influential work, Momigliano defined the 1938 racist laws as a perversion of Italian history and culture forced upon Italy by the Nazi ally, and dedicated many pages of his work to the rescue and help offered by Italian citizens and institutions, especially the Catholic Church. His conclusion was that 'no Italian Israelite could forget, along with the bitterness of persecution, the comfort obtained by the solidarity of Catholicism'.⁶⁹ The reference to Catholicism as a whole (rather than to individual Catholics who helped Jews) was consistent with the perspective offered by Catholicism itself.⁷⁰ In the immediate postwar it was adopted by many political parties and some of the main cultural institutions, such as *Enciclopedia Cattolica* and *Enciclopedia Italiana*.⁷¹ In

66 See Schwarz 1998; Schwarz 2001: 18.

67 Debenedetti 1999b: 82, 91 ('Otto ebrei' was originally published in 1944).

68 Silvia Lombroso, *Diario di una madre (si può stampare): Pagine vissute* (Rome: Dalmatia, 1945), p. 198, quoted in Schwarz 2004: 121–2.

69 Momigliano 1946: 132.

70 See the article 'Ritorno a casa', *Avvenire d'Italia* (4 September 1945), referenced in Fantini 2005: 217.

71 See Focardi 1999; Schwarz 2004: 125.

addition to help provided by the population, it became a recurring fixture of Jewish memoirs and official commemorations.⁷²

If one of the foundations of Italian Jewish narrative of the Holocaust was help from non-Jews, another was based on the activism of militants involved in Zionism or in the Resistance, both choices conveniently conducive to a narrative of destruction and regeneration. An example of the continuum Holocaust-Resistance-Zionism is represented by the Monument to Jewish Sacrifice inaugurated in Milan in 1947, which interred the remains of Italian Jews who perished in the Holocaust alongside those of Jews who died in the Resistance and those of a *sabra* militant of the extremist group Irgun who also perished in Italy.⁷³

Il grido della terra

The insertion of the Resistance or Zionism in narratives about the Holocaust or its aftermath was not only limited to Jewish circles, it also circulated in representations aimed at a broader public. If among its themes *L'ebreo errante* contained the category Holocaust-Resistance, Duilio Coletti's *Il grido della terra* assumes as its point of departure the link Holocaust-Zionism.

The film's protagonist is David Taumen, an Austrian Jew actively fighting Nazism as an Allied soldier on the Italian front. After the war, David adheres to the Zionist cause and sets out for Palestine, where he joins the militant group Irgun and participates in a series of actions against the British. Unbeknown to him, David's father and fiancée, who survived Auschwitz, migrate from Italy to Palestine, where they are guided by Arie' (a member of the Haganah). Meanwhile, David has started a relationship

72 Schwarz 2004: 119, 141. It was also uncritically adopted in historical discourse, as in the case of Chabod 1961: 96.

73 Schwarz 2004: 60.

with Judith, who is also a member of the Irgun. In a melodramatic twist, David, his father, Dina, and Arie' meet again on a *kibbutz*. The choice between sentiments (Dina) and political activism (Judith) is made still more dramatic by the fact that David and Arie' are former brothers-in-arms, who are now pursuing very different political tactics. But the *kibbutz* is surrounded by British troops, who arrest David and sentence him to death for having participated in an attack against the British headquarters. The film ends with a redemptive promise – the struggle for the creation of a state continues, working 'towards a better day' (as one review put it).⁷⁴

The director Duilio Coletti had a past in fascist cinema, and in the early 1950s he was responsible for some dubious celebrations of military heroism in films such as *I sette dell'Orsa Maggiore* (Human Torpedoes, 1953) and *Divisione Folgore* (Folgore Division, 1954). *Il grido della terra* is imbued with anti-British overtones that the censorship bureau did not fail to notice, defining it as a film 'offensive towards a friendly country'.⁷⁵ But the film is also decidedly sympathetic towards the Zionist cause, especially the less radical methods of the Haganah, considering that Arie' is the one who survives to resume the fight for independence. Co-written by Carlo Levi and Alessandro Fersen (and with costume design by Emanuele Luzzati),⁷⁶ the film paid an unconventional degree of attention and care toward the description of Jewish society and customs. For this reason, Guido Fink has recently defined *Il grido della terra* as 'melodramatic but not entirely mystifying'.⁷⁷

The story of this group of survivors, and their painful beginning of a new life, was probably intended to establish a link in the minds of viewers with the Resistance in Italy, thus legitimising the Jewish fight in Palestine. However, the film (shot with the active collaboration of Jewish Displaced Persons precariously living in the Palese camp in Apulia) was a commer-

74 'Il grido della terra', *La Stampa* (1 May 1949): 2. I borrow the expression 'redemptive promise' from Marcus 2007: 32–3.

75 'Il grido della terra' 2008: 64.

76 The other co-writers were Tullio Pinelli, Giorgio Prosperi, and Lewis F. Glitter.

77 Fink 1999: 90.

cial failure.⁷⁸ As one review stressed, the film found itself outdone by the events, i.e. the institution of Israel.⁷⁹ It is also clear that *Il grido della terra* focuses more on the aftermath of the Holocaust and on some of its effects, than on the representation of the event. Moreover, it does not engage with Italian responsibilities.

Early understandings of the Holocaust relied for the most part on existing narrative frameworks and cultural traditions. *L'ebreo errante's* mixture of Catholic prejudice and Resistance ethos represents a telling display of what conceptual frameworks were available at the time in a mass medium such as cinema. But this must not prevent us from recognising that this film also contains an early form of acknowledgement of the event. *Febbre di vivere* and *I fidanzati* show that what was clearly much more awkward in Italian cinema of the late 1940s and early 1950s (as in broader debates) was Italy's involvement in the Holocaust. As the following chapters show, this is a recurring pattern, and the narrative of innocence and victimhood characterising these early reflections lingered for many years; indeed it was the strongest and most pervasive specific trait of Holocaust memory in Italy.

⁷⁸ Virelli 1948.

⁷⁹ m.g., in *Intermezzo*, 14 (3 July 1949), quoted in Chiti and Poppi 1991: 180–1.

CHAPTER THREE

‘You Are One of Us’: The Early 1960s

Holocaust debates between the end of the 1950s and the first half of the 1960s were closely linked to discussions of Fascism, antifascism, and the Resistance. These, in turn, were influenced by developments in the Cold War and by domestic issues. In stressing the importance of the Resistance-Holocaust link, I argue that, unlike Holocaust memory in Israel, West Germany, and the United States, the Eichmann trial did not represent a landmark event of the same magnitude in Italy.¹

The Resistance in the 1950s

At the height of the Cold War, celebrating the Resistance or debating fascist crimes were low on the priorities of Italian governments, whose attention focused rather on anticommunism. As Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi explained in 1952 to the American Ambassador in Italy Ellsworth Bunker, ‘no doubt [fascists] would fight on our side in case of war, while the same is not true about communists.’² As in West Germany, the Cold War required less ‘memory and justice [...] and more “integration” of those who had

¹ On Israel, see Segev 2000: 11; Loshitzky 2002: 16; Zertal 2005: 67; Shapira 2004: 20. For West Germany, see Herf 2004b: 41; Schlant 1999: 19, 53. The impact of the trial in the US has been discussed by Shandler 1999: xviii, 81; Novick 1999: 133. Comparative discussions of the trial's impact in Israel, Europe and America are in Cole 2000: 47–72 and especially 62 and 68; Levy and Sznajder 2006: 105–12.

² Quoted in Crainz 2005: 3.

gone astray.³ Neo-fascist circles benefited from this situation. Their call for national reconciliation against the communist enemy struck a chord in the Vatican and in part of the DC.⁴ At the height of this process it seemed almost as if anticommunism had replaced antifascism as the touchstone of Italian democracy.⁵ Only after the death of Stalin and the relatively disappointing results of the 1953 elections for the DC, did the political elite opt for a very partial retrieval of the Resistance myth,⁶ emphasising the role played by the Army and by the *healthy forces* among the partisans (as opposed to the *totalitarian* ones) whilst simultaneously barring opposition parties from participating in the commemorations.⁷ The only non-governmental commemoration allowed was organised by the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, to commemorate Jewish participation in the Resistance and the help 'provided to Jews by Italians'.⁸

The conservative shift of the early 1950s in the perception of the war was reflected in the film industry. Since public funding for the production of films was ultimately decided by the government, 'leftist' proposals were usually rejected.⁹ In addition to films like *I sette dell'Orsa Maggiore* and *Divisione Folgore* mentioned above, the image of the Italian war to which viewers were exposed was typified by films like *Carica eroica* (Heroic Charge, Francesco De Robertis, 1952) and *Penne nere* (Black Feathers, Oreste Biancoli, 1952). Gian Piero Brunetta has written that, by celebrating the virtues of the Italian army during the war, these and other similar films directly supported the nationalist, anticommunist and antisocialist ideology of the right.¹⁰ Such a view is confirmed by Guido Fink's observa-

3 Herf 1997: 267.

4 Focardi 2005: 31–2.

5 Focardi 2001: 103.

6 Cenci 1999: 356. On the controversial 1953 elections see Ginsborg 1990: 141–3.

7 This is how the Deputy Prime Minister Giuseppe Saragat framed the issue in a preliminary meeting of the Council on Ministers, as reported in Crainz 1996: 39.

8 Note written on 3 March 1955 by the Cabinet of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, and referenced in Schwarz 2004: 152, 234.

9 See Crainz 2005: 7; on the direct influence of the government on Italian cinema, see Brunetta 2001b: 46–9, 73–96. See also Cooke 2005: 120–2.

10 Brunetta 2001b: 569.

tion that in this period filmic glorifications of the fascist war outnumbered those of the Resistance.¹¹

Renewed interest in Fascism, Nazism, and the Resistance

However, this tendency changed in the second half of the decade. The inception of a policy of coexistence between the two superpowers opened up new ground for the discussion of Nazism and the Holocaust, and set the field for the watershed event represented by the arrest and trial of Adolf Eichmann. Although the Eichmann trial had an impact in Italy, Manuela Consonni's claim that it 'turned into one of the most important events in postwar Italy and a unique impetus for mobilization against the Right' is overstated.¹² Nonetheless, it was the case that the trial was covered in the daily press and led to the publication of a number of books on the subject, often written with a journalistic approach.¹³ It also informed the public about the camps, and contributed to the construction of an autonomous image of the Jewish victims (a process already set in train by the success of Primo Levi's *Se questo è un uomo* and André Schwarz-Bart's novel *Le Dernier des Justes*).¹⁴

Unlike in the US,¹⁵ the trial was not followed closely by television. It was only in 1967 that an episode of the relatively popular series *Teatro-Inchiesta* (Inquiry Theatre) dedicated to Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal

11 Fink 2000: 496. Cristina Baldassini has noted how celebrating the heroism of Italian soldiers was integral to the construction of a 'moderate' (i.e. a-fascists more than simply nostalgic) memory of Fascism; see Baldassini 2008: 55.

12 Consonni 2004: 95. In the conclusion of her essay, she implicitly contradicts her own claim, writing that in the end, 'the Eichmann event in Italy reverberated mainly on and in the world of Italian Jewry' (98). See also Lichtner 2008: 42.

13 A survey of some of these publications is in Valabrega 1961b.

14 Levi 1997a; Schwarz-Bart 1960.

15 Shandler 1999: 83–121.

reconstructed the story of Eichmann's capture by the Israeli secret service.¹⁶ With the series' trademark mixture of archival footage, voiceover, and dramatised reconstructions, 'Missione Wiesenthal' (30 April 1967, Programma Nazionale, 21.00) informed viewers of the circumstances of Eichmann's escape to Argentina and his role in the Final Solution. Nevertheless, in the early part of the decade, Holocaust-related themes were rather marginal in RAI programmes. The first major reference to them was in a 1959 episode of the series *50 anni (1898-1948)* entitled 'Il prezzo della pace' (The Price of Peace), which framed the Holocaust within a discussion of political deportation. After this rather casual reference, the only programme that showed signs of having been influenced by the trial was *Il giudice* (The Judge, Programma Nazionale, 21 June 1961, 22.45) a 30-minute reportage by journalist Enzo Biagi about the Warsaw ghetto diary held by the teenager Dawid Rubinowicz.¹⁷

The Eichmann trial figured in a broader context of renewed interest in antifascism and the perverse outcomes of Fascism and Nazism,¹⁸ but it did not promote a more general rethinking of Italy's involvement in the Holocaust. It must be said that the prosecutor Gideon Hausner himself praised the help offered by non-Jewish Italians as exceptional.¹⁹ However, when survivor Hulda Campagnano Cassuto gave her less enthusiastic testimony, readers of the daily press were offered distorted and altogether more palatable accounts, as Campagnano Cassuto herself lamented in an article published in the Jewish journal *Israel*.²⁰

16 See Giovanni Perego, 'Diresse per sedici anni la "Missione Eichmann"', *Radiocorriere TV* 44/18 (1967): 38-41.

17 See Enzo Biagi 'David, l'Anna Frank della Polonia', *Radiocorriere TV* 38/25 (1961): 16-17.

18 This renewed interest was not an exclusively Italian phenomenon. Jeffrey Herf highlighted a similar pattern about West Germany. He saw the Eichmann trial as a watershed event, during which 'we shift from questions regarding origins [of Fascism] to those of persistence and diffusion'; see Herf 2004b: 41.

19 Italian readers could read these statements in Galante Garrone 1961: 109-10.

20 Hulda Campagnano Cassuto 'La parola ad una testimone del processo', *Israel* (21 April 1961): 3. Her real testimony was published in Minerbi 1962: 47-51.

On a smaller scale, a further factor to concur in drawing public attention was the widespread (although short-lived) 'swastika wave'.²¹ This phenomenon, consisting of an outbreak of neo-Nazi propaganda acts, started with the desecration of a synagogue in Cologne, Germany, on Christmas morning of 1959, and rapidly spread out to the rest of Europe and the United States.²² Further internationally, the replacement of the unwaveringly anticommunist Pius XII with the reformist John XXIII at the head of the Catholic Church posed important consequences for the Italian context. The opening of the Second Vatican Council laid the first stone in the process of revising anti-Jewish prejudices and boosted inter-religious dialogue, culminating in the *Nostra Aetate* Encyclical in 1965.²³

Each of these international circumstances merged with the rapidly changing social structure of Italy, which manifested itself rather dramatically during the riots of July 1960, when the neo-fascist *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (Italian Social Movement, MSI) announced its intention to hold the party convention in the left-wing stronghold of Genoa. The announcement generated waves of protest in several cities.²⁴ The death of ten demonstrators precipitated a crisis of the centrist DC government and paved the way for the first centre-left government two years later.

Antifascism played an important role in these demonstrations, which included widespread youth participation. Underlying the call for antifascism was not only scorn for historical Fascism, of which the new generation had little knowledge,²⁵ but also a rejection of the authoritarianism and bigotry of important sections of the political, economic, and cultural elite. The events of summer 1960 represented a caesura that not only situated antifascism at the centre of the Italian social and political scene, but furthermore redefined the entire antifascist paradigm, adapting it to an

21 Valabrega 1970: 162.

22 Ehrlich 1962: 264. See also Novick 1999: 128.

23 Stefani 1998; Miccoli 1999a.

24 See Cooke 2000.

25 Bravo 2003: 134.

age of rapid economic development, social mobility, growing consumerism and secularisation.²⁶

Although these contradictions exploded spectacularly in 1960, their gestation had been much longer. Guido Crainz identifies 1958 as the year in which the first signs of a different attitude towards antifascism and the Resistance by the government first became manifest. Indeed, this year witnessed the first occasion on which a prime minister (Adone Zoli) participated in (and thus legitimised) a rally organised by the communist-led *Associazione Nazionale dei Partigiani d'Italia* (Italian Partisans' National Association, ANPI).²⁷ Thus, the turn of the decade was a point at which breaches in the strict conformism of the 1950s were counterbalanced by political repression and cultural censorship.²⁸ The growing interest in the country's recent past must be framed in this context. The series of successful lectures on Fascism and antifascism organised in several cities,²⁹ which occasionally featured the experience of deportation, are examples of this general trend.³⁰ The 1950s had seen a trickle of memoirs about this latter theme,³¹ with the full inclusion of Jewish accounts to this canon in the final

26 Crainz 2005: 180–1, 163–4.

27 Crainz 1996: 41.

28 Gian Piero Brunetta has noted that the top grossing movies of 1957 were carefree romantic comedies such as *Belle ma povere* (Poor Girl, Pretty Girl, Dino Risi), *Lazzarella* (Carlo Ludovico Bragaglia), *Vacanze a Ischia* (One Week with Love, Mario Camerini), while the top four films in 1960 were represented by the more socially-conscious *La dolce vita* (Federico Fellini), *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (Rocco and His Brothers, Luchino Visconti), *La ciociara* (Two Women, Vittorio De Sica), and *Tutti a casa* (Everybody Go Home, Luigi Comencini); see Brunetta 2001b: 524–5.

29 Permolli 1960; Antonicelli 1975.

30 Piero Caleffi and Mario Spinella recounted their stories as political and military deportees in *Fascismo e antifascismo. Lezioni e testimonianze* 1962. Enzo Enriquez Agnoletti, Giorgio Bassani, and Primo Levi discussed the persecution and deportation of Jews in Arbizzani and Caltabiano 1964. See Alberto Cavaglion in 'Interventi alla tavola rotonda del 7 giugno 2007' 2008.

31 Caleffi 1954 opened a brief season of similar publications, such as Fergnani 1955; Meneghetti 1957; Piazza 1956.

years of the decade.³² The growing number of references to deportation was part of a broader rethinking of the country's past across many fields of the political spectrum. However, the reappraisal of the past fell short of thoroughly questioning Italian society's involvement in the Holocaust.³³

Il Generale della Rovere

Roberto Rossellini's *Il Generale della Rovere*, set in Genoa in 1944, is the story of a swindler (Bardone) who presents himself as a retired colonel with the right connections with the German hierarchy, and makes a living out of deceiving the needy relatives of those who have fallen prey to the Nazis. Arrested by the Germans, he is offered a deal that would save his life: he must assume the identity of General della Rovere – a highly respected leader of the Resistance killed by the Germans, serve time in the *San Vittore* prison in Milan, and identify other leaders held in custody. Bardone accepts the life-line offered. However, exposed to the dignity and determination of the real resisters, he experiences a metamorphosis, conducting himself as if he was the real General. As a reprisal for a partisan action, the Nazis decide to execute a number of prisoners. As a way of forcing Bardone/della Rovere to reveal the identity of the other leaders, his name is put on the list, along with Jews, petty criminals, and antifascists. Willingly accepting his fate, the spurious General dies crying 'long live Italy! Long live the King!'

Il Generale della Rovere premiered at the 1959 Venice Film Festival, winning the Golden Lion. It shared this accolade with Mario Monicelli's *La Grande guerra* (The Great War). It became the eighth-highest grossing film of the season in Italy.³⁴ It was immediately hailed by commentators

32 Primo Levi besides, it is worth mentioning Bruck 1959. In 1959 and 1961, il Saggiatore republished Debenedetti 1999a and 1999b.

33 On this, see Cavaglion 2006: 26–31.

34 See Spinazzola 1962: 73.

as a return, for the director of *Roma città aperta* (Open City, 1945) and *Paisà*, to the themes that had made him an acknowledged master,³⁵ as a sign of the re-launch of Italian cinema after years of disengagement,³⁶ and a reaffirmation of the moral value of the Resistance.³⁷

L'Unità eulogised the film for telling the story of a morally despicable character who is redeemed by his encounter with the morality of the Resistance.³⁸ The communist newspaper's only criticism was that the film's focus on a cynical trickster put the positive characters (active subjects in *Roma città aperta*) in the background.³⁹ Despite communist emphasis on the Resistance, the novella by conservative journalist Indro Montanelli, on which the script was based, downplayed the role of the Resistance, focussing instead on the morality of military values.⁴⁰ Thus, the film's origins comprised of mixed political orientations, as testified by the writing credits, which include Montanelli himself, Diego Fabbri, and Rossellini's communist long-time professional partner Sergio Amidei.

The element of compromise that characterises the film accounts for the praise it received from diverse quarters, according to their different readings. The Catholic press discarded the theme of the Resistance in favour of a universalising defence of human dignity.⁴¹ For example, the magazine

35 See as examples Arturo Lanocita, 'Il "Generale della Rovere" di Rossellini ha risollevato il tono della rassegna', *Corriere della Sera* (1 September 1959): 3; and Sergio Maldini, 'Il falso "Generale Della Rovere" ci ha restituito l'autentico Rossellini', *il Resto del Carlino* (31 August 1959): 3.

36 See the comments expressed by the PCI MP Antonello Trombadori, 'La lettera di Rossellini', *L'Unità* (9 September 1959): 1; Mida 1961: 90, 97; Castello 1959: 14; see also Hawk., 'Il Generale Della Rovere', *Variety* (9 September 1959).

37 Ugo Casiraghi, 'La necessaria battaglia del "Generale della Rovere"', *L'Unità* (4 November 1959): 3.

38 See Ugo Casiraghi, 'Con "Il Generale della Rovere" Rossellini e De Sica si riabilitano', *L'Unità* (31 August 1959): 7; and Ugo Casiraghi, 'Due furfanti patetici e grotteschi travolti dalla "Grande Guerra"', *L'Unità* (6 September 1959): 5.

39 Casiraghi 'Necessaria battaglia'.

40 Montanelli 1959; Mida 1961: 91.

41 This is the gist of the argument offered by the Catholic reviewer Ernesto Laura, see Laura 1959, also reproduced in Corich 1961: 173.

Letture claimed that Bardone was moved to change his conduct by his identification with the role he was playing, rather than by his encounter with the morality of the Resistance,⁴² so depriving his 'conversion' of any political value. Following the same line of interpretation, the *Office Catholique International du Cinéma* (International Catholic Organisation for Cinema, OCIC) awarded the film its yearly prize on the grounds that it was the story of a sinner who redeemed himself, while the historical setting provided only the backdrop.⁴³

The same interpretation led to criticism from non-communist left-wing commentators. The socialist *Avanti!* criticised the character's conversion for being the mere result of an emotive reaction,⁴⁴ and therefore weak in political terms.⁴⁵ The intellectual Franco Fortini articulated this critique still further. In Fortini's penetrating reading, Bardone acknowledged no political value to the Resistance other than the courage of its members. In his eyes, the film transformed the Resistance into a morality play based on a conversion to good and self-sacrifice, at the same time noting that the fascists also sacrificed themselves, and were nonetheless wrong.⁴⁶ In other words, while the PCI read the film as a step towards legitimising the Resistance, others saw it as a whitewashing of its value. The issues at stake in Fortini's critique were further underlined by film scholar Pio Baldelli, who observed that the film's ecumenical patriotism levelled fascists and antifascists, portraying them all as Italian victims.⁴⁷

42 Taddei 1959: 856–7.

43 See Baragli 1959: 287–8 n 7. The same judgment was given by the CCC (the official Italian Catholic body with functions of gatekeepers of doctrine and morality), which stressed the human rehabilitation of the main protagonist, see *Il Generale della Rovere* 1959: 1.

44 Mario Gallo, 'Molti si sono messi sull'attenti davanti al generale di Rossellini', *Avanti!* (1 September 1959): 2.

45 Lino Micciché, 'Col Leone d'Oro a Rossellini e Monicelli la giuria di Venezia ha premiato i migliori', *Avanti!* (8 September 1959): 3.

46 Franco Fortini, 'Cronache della vita breve', *Avanti!* (10 November 1959): 3. This particular critique was also raised by two of the most important left-wing film scholars: Aristarco 1959: 422; and Baldelli 1972: 150–1.

47 Baldelli 1972: 152–4.

In fact, fascist collaborators in the film were often presented by reviewers as little more than poor ‘devils’ who struggled just like everyone else.⁴⁸ To some extent the Germans were also portrayed in ways that differed from those characteristic of the early days of neorealism. As a group they were cruel but, ironically, SS Colonel Müller’s sophisticated manners and humanity gave him an edge over many other characters.⁴⁹ The non-Italian journal *Film in Review* picked up on this ambiguity. The journal defined the film a symptom of Italy’s ideological confusion, whereby all Italians were good (whatever side they were on),⁵⁰ and only Nazis were left to play the part of the ‘bad guys.’ But, since the Cold War political agenda demanded a benevolent approach towards Germany (as opposed to communist emphasis on the continuities between Adenauer’s government and the Third Reich),⁵¹ the *Generale della Rovere* produced a portrait of the ‘good German.’⁵²

Bardone himself was seen by many commentators as cunning but ultimately selfless a character (although early in the film we see him trying to sell a fake sapphire claiming it belonged to a rich Jewish lady on the run). A number of reviews focused on the character’s display of ‘Italian’ vices turning into virtues, a recurrent theme that came to prominence many

48 This is how the Catholic cinema journal *Rivista del cinematografo* saw them; see Laura 1959. It must be added that one isolated review stressed how the execution of the ten prisoners was made by the RSI, and saw in this episode a ‘ghastly page of truth, in which the fascist appears for the inhuman servant he was, more of a perpetrator than the Nazi invaders themselves,’ see Bruno 1959: 190.

49 Müller represented a different but no less sinister aspect of Nazism for Guglielmo Biraghi, in *Il Messaggero* (31 August 1959), referenced in *Il Generale della Rovere* 1959: 2.

50 This characteristic is also noted in a book published years after the film’s release by Rondolino 1973: 98.

51 Hints to this communist political campaign can be found in Casiraghi ‘Necessaria battaglia’.

52 See Arthur B. Clarke, in *Film in Review* (November 1960): 552–3, in *Il Generale della Rovere* 1959: 3. A similar re-appraisal of Germany was underway around the same time in Holocaust-related representations produced in Britain; see Rosenfeld 2005: 51.

years later with the miniseries *Perlasca*. The Catholic *Avvenire d’Italia* and the conservative *il Resto del Carlino* seconded the film’s praise of the heroic Italians who, even when morally corrupt, allegedly never lose sight of their dignity and humanity.⁵³ These interpretations of the main character’s personality led to numerous piqued responses on the left, which rejected his role as a symbol of Italy, and saw him as a sign of Italy’s moral decline in the 1950s.⁵⁴

Thus, a 1959 film about the Resistance was widely seen as being at the same time historical and political.⁵⁵ In this politicised reception, the hints made in the film to the specific sufferings of the Jews often went unnoticed. Such was the case of the long sequence leading up to the executions. The designated victims are Bardone/della Rovere, a few partisans, some suit-wearing profiteers, and a number of Jews. Reviewers did not notice the film’s reference to anti-Semitic prejudices that came in the shape of an allusion from one of the profiteers that there was some justification for not only the partisans, but also the Jews to be executed.⁵⁶ Instead, reviewers identified another episode from the same scene, showing Jewish and Christian prayers merging shortly before the execution, as being among the

53 Giovan Battista Cavallaro, ‘De Sica è più maresciallo che “Generale della Rovere”’, *L’Avvenire d’Italia* (31 August 1959): 7; Sergio Maldini, ‘“Il Generale della Rovere” e “La grande guerra” hanno vinto ex-aequo il Festival di Venezia’, *il Resto del Carlino* (7 September 1959): 3. The Catholic magazine *Letture* defined Bardone as ‘typically representative of Southern kind-heartedness’, see Taddei 1959: 855.

54 See Morandini 1959: 379, who defined Bardone as the symbol of a counter-Italy that had grown and proliferated since the end of the war; Casiraghi ‘Necessaria battaglia’; Corich 1961: 178; Bianchi 1959: 83. It is worth noting that a similar critique of Bardone was articulated in a documentary aired on RAI in 1969, ‘Il Generale della Rovere’ [General della Rovere], episode of *La vera storia di ...*, Piero Nelli, Secondo Programma 13 May, 21.15). The programme passes a severe judgment on Bardone, who is seen as nothing more than a soulless profiteer, and on the film’s equivocal portrayal of the character. In its unfaltering condemnation, the documentary exemplifies a shift towards a more militant notion of antifascism that occurred in the 1960s, and which is examined in the next chapter.

55 Tommaso Chiaretti, ‘Tutti eroi tutti accoppiati’, *Mondo Nuovo*, 1/1 (13 September 1959): 10.

56 This scene is also discussed in Lichtner 2008: 48.

film's highlights.⁵⁷ However, in this case, the Jewish presence went unnoticed. The Catholic *Rivista del cinematografo* defined the scene as a sign of the authentic religious message of the film,⁵⁸ while *l'Unità* bypassed the religious theme and referred to the motley crew of prisoners in terms of 'comrades' of the 'patriots' (i.e. partisans).⁵⁹ The success of *Generale della Rovere* set the tone for a slew of films set during the Second World War and the Resistance (more than twenty in the three following years).⁶⁰ Two of them, *Kapò*, and *La lunga notte del '43* (The Long Night of '43, Florestano Vancini, 1960), premiered at the 1960 Venice Festival. Both films engaged with the persecution of Jews.

Kapò

Kapò is one of a string of Holocaust films directed by Italian film-makers setting their action abroad. It is the story of French Jewish teenager Edith, who is sent with her parents to a concentration camp, where a merciful inmate provides her with the uniform of a deceased non-Jewish prisoner. The extreme conditions in the camp bring her pain, desperation, and moral debasement. In order to survive, Edith must hide her identity and assume a new one, starting with her name (which she changes to Nicole). She first befriends a German officer, and then becomes a much dreaded *Kapo*. But her spiralling degradation comes to a halt when a battalion of Russian POWs arrives at the camp. The unmarred morality of the Russian soldiers (who plan to escape as soon as they set foot in the camp) and, most of all,

57 See Gian Luigi Rondi, 'Il Generale della Rovere', *Il Tempo* (8 October 1959), now in Rondi 1998: 165. It is important that the episode refers to Jews and Catholics praying together, instead of showing only a Jewish prayer as Lichtner describes 2008: 49.

58 Joan Bernard in *Rivista del cinematografo*, 9–10 (September–October 1959): 322, in *Il Generale della Rovere* 1959: 3.

59 Casiraghi 'Con "Il Generale della Rovere"':

60 Rondolino 1963: 12.

the fondness she has developed for one of them (Sascha), lead Nicole to redeem herself. When informed that the only chance of finding an escape route would imply her death, she accepts her fate. Nicole/Edith's sacrifice for the cause reconciles her with her own true identity, and her dying breath is the *Shema Yisrael*.

Among the themes picked up by critics was the effect of Nazi savagery on its victims. Years before Primo Levi's analysis of the 'grey zone', the film powerfully explored the ambiguities of life in the camps, also anticipating by more than a decade the exploration of the conflict between morality and survival presented in radically different style by a 'new discourse' film like *Pasqualino settebellezze*.⁶¹ Many commentators were struck by the representation in the first part of the film of an as yet unseen and perverse facet of Nazism.⁶² As the novelist Vasco Pratolini noted, the main character's lack of heroism in the first half of *Kapò* was remarkable.⁶³ This was an element of novelty that marked a contrast with the neorealist tradition of war films, where Pontecorvo learnt his trade, usually focused on the moral exempla of the resisters.⁶⁴ However, if the first part was startling, the second half was overly sentimental and failed to explain Edith's sudden

61 *Se questo è un uomo* featured among the books read by the director and the screen-writer Franco Solinas before shooting the film; see Bignardi 1999: 107.

62 See Arturo Lanocita, 'Il film di Cayatte ha vinto il "Leone d'Oro" di Venezia', *Corriere della Sera* (8 September 1960): 3; Lan [Arturo Lanocita], 'Kapò', *Corriere della Sera* (30 September 1960): 6; Vice, "'Kapò" di Gillo Pontecorvo', *il Resto del Carlino* (16 October 1960): 6; Morandini 1960; Francione 2000: 18; Ugo Casiraghi, 'Vergognoso epilogo dell'operazione Lonero', *l'Unità* (8 September 1960): 3. Pontecorvo stressed that the psychological and moral destruction of the victims of Nazism was the main theme of his film; see 'Un equilibrio di 10.000 anni' 1960: 274. Gian Luigi Rondi, 'Kapò', *Il Tempo* (6 October 1960), now in Rondi 1998: 178–9 saw it differently, and claimed that 'stories like this one have started to tire by now' (in 1960!).

63 Vasco Pratolini in *ABC* (16 October 1960), quoted in 'Kapò' 1960: 83.

64 Lichtner 2008: 49.

change, thus weakening the whole structure of the film,⁶⁵ as the director himself acknowledged years later.⁶⁶

Perhaps more surprising was the critique offered by writer Alberto Moravia. Moravia went against the grain, taking *Kapò* to task for its alleged failure to show Nazism's debasement of its own victims, although he also added that the camps were one of few cases where reality defied any imagination.⁶⁷ This critique, further corroborated by film scholar Morando Morandini's uneasiness about the 'reconstructed horror' of a feature film,⁶⁸ introduced the theme of the 'limits of representation', as an implicit acknowledgement of the particular status of Holocaust representations. However marginal, the introduction in Italy of this theme, already debated in France,⁶⁹ shows a degree of rising awareness of the specificity of the Holocaust in some circles. Another sign of change in the perception of Holocaust films could be observed in the fact that *Kapò* was the first film to be considered as belonging to a Holocaust genre of sorts. Perhaps surprisingly, no reviewer mentioned *L'ebreo errante*, the memory of which had waned after a mere twelve years, and many defined *Kapò*

65 See Lanocita, 'Film di Cayatte'; Lanocita 'Kapò'; Casiraghi 'Vergognoso epilogo'; Ugo Casiraghi, "'Kapò" di Gillo Pontecorvo', *l'Unità* (1 October 1960): 5; Vice, 'Kapò', *L'Avvenire d'Italia* (16 October 1960): 7; Tommaso Chiaretti, 'I film dell'antifascismo', *Mondo Nuovo*, 2/42 (23 October 1960): 8; Morandini 1960; Bruno 1960: 725; Leo Pestelli, 'Kapò', *La Stampa* (8 September 1960), quoted in 'Kapò' 1960: 81; Cincotti 1960: 47.

66 Ghirelli 1978: 14.

67 Alberto Moravia, 'Personaggi ingiustificati', *L'Espresso*, 6/42 (16 October 1960): 23. On the troubled relationship of Moravia (née Pincherle) with his Jewish origins, see Procaccia 1998.

68 Morandini 1960.

69 As shown by Jacques Rivette's harsh critique of *Kapò*. Rivette's argument was that every attempt to represent the camps through realism was doomed to fail, because their reality could not be represented. Moreover, Pontecorvo's spectacularisation of death in the camps was defined by Rivette as 'deserving nothing more than the deepest scorn', see Rivette 1961. On the importance of this review in the debate on the morality of representation, especially in France, see Saxton 2008: 15–17.

as the first Italian film to represent the camps.⁷⁰ The film was therefore grouped together with products directed by non-Italian filmmakers, such as *Nuit et Brouillard* (Night and Fog, Alain Resnais, 1956) released in Italy only a few months earlier after a four-year delay, and *The Diary of Anne Frank* (George Stevens, 1959), a parallel facilitated by the fact that *Kapò*'s Nicole, Susan Stransberg, had played the role of Anne in the Broadway version of the diary.⁷¹

However, the film was more often framed within the genre of war and Resistance films. The director himself, an assimilated Jew, explained years later that the Holocaust theme in *Kapò* was part of a wider rejection of war and its violence.⁷² The film was interpreted as such by reviewers at the time, as in the case of the conservative newspaper *Il Messaggero*, which commended its supposed message of reconciliation.⁷³ The film's story of perdition and resurrection, of evil chosen and then rejected in redemption, struck a deep chord in Catholic circles.⁷⁴ *Kapò* won the 1960 *San Fedele* prize (awarded by the *San Fedele* cultural centre in Milan to Italian films displaying high spiritual values) with the motivation that 'having powerfully shown and condemned Evil's fury against all human and spiritual values, it suggests they can still survive in a last hope and a heroic sacrifice.'⁷⁵ The moral appeal of the story lay in its treatment of the theme of redemption through sacrifice. One of the consequences of this reading was that it provided a way to deflect the interpretation of the film's meaning from a denunciation of Nazism to more universalising themes such

70 Casiraghi 'Vergognoso epilogo'; Francione 2000: 18; 'Un equilibrio di 10.000 anni' 1960.

71 Paolo Valamarana, 'Un verdetto che ha sorpreso', *Il Popolo* (8 September 1960): 5; Casiraghi 'Kapò'. A summary of cinematic representations of the Holocaust, not including Italian films, had already been published in Casiraghi 1955.

72 See Bignardi 1999: 107.

73 Guglielmo Biraghi, "'Il Passaggio del Reno" di Cayatte ha vinto il Leone d'Oro di S. Marco', *Il Messaggero* (8 September 1960): 11.

74 These are the motivations adopted by the *Centro Cattolico Cinematografico* (Catholic Centre of Cinematography, CCC) to eulogise *Kapò*, and recommend it to adult viewers, see *Kapò* 1960: 1.

75 See *Kapò* 1960: 1. See also Caruso 1961.

as love, human goodness, and solidarity, as was the case in the Catholic literary journal *Letture*.⁷⁶

Universalisation was not the only possible outcome of this interpretation. Perhaps more insidious, and more widespread, were exegeses based on the notion of purifying death. This reading was clearly adopted by *Corriere della Sera*'s Arturo Lanocita,⁷⁷ but the same tones were used in a review by Marxist film scholar Edoardo Bruno. In Bruno's view, Edith's death had the Christ-like value of a divine sacrifice made to free the other prisoners.⁷⁸ His continuous references to the film's ending in terms of moral redemption, sacrifice, and expiation were conspicuously oblivious to the inherently problematic choice of adopting a Christian framework of interpretation for a Jewish-centred Holocaust story. Such a reading was awkward for at least two reasons. The first was that it perpetuated an interpretation of the destruction of the Jews in the camps as a rite of redemption and purification for their own sins, enacted on their bodies for the benefit of all humankind. The second troubling facet of these interpretations was that they tended to obliterate the very Jewishness of the Holocaust. In Edith, reviewers definitely saw a Jew.⁷⁹ But they saw her through the prism of traditional Catholicism.

The Jewish writer Alberto Lecco took this same Christianisation of a Jewish victim to task in an article for the communist cultural journal *Il Contemporaneo*. The decidedly Jewish-centred take Lecco gave to his article, its placement in a PCI publication, and the kind of issues he raised, make it a fascinating – albeit rather isolated – piece of Jewish cultural critique in a non-Jewish publication. Lecco was aware of the anti-Jewish undertones of the *Kapò* debate. The left itself, adopting the 'fall and redemption' interpretation, was not exempt from it.⁸⁰ However, in his view, the responsibility for this prejudiced reading lay primarily in the film itself. According to

76 Casolaro 1960: 780.

77 Lanocita, 'Film'; Lanocita, 'Kapò'.

78 Bruno 1960: 726.

79 Her identity was explicitly acknowledged by Casiraghi 'Vergognoso epilogo'; "Kapò" di Gillo Pontecorvo; Vice, 'Kapò'; Valmarana, 'Verdetto'; Moravia, 'Personaggi'.

80 Lecco 1960–1961.

Lecco, after the Holocaust, the representation of a morally debased Jew surrounded by non-Jewish heroes was inappropriate, since it replicated stereotypes about Jewish selfishness. Moreover, Lecco saw Edith's transformation into Nicole as lacking credibility. He contested not so much the fact that Jews escaped persecution by disguising their identity (as many did), but rather the suddenness of Edith's metamorphosis, her lack of fear that some subtle aspect of her way of speaking or manners could give her away. Lecco's critique is a clear assertion of Jewish identity, as something that cannot be easily done away with. In the construction of Edith's character he thus saw a lack of understanding of what it meant to be Jewish in Europe 'during Fascism'. For these reasons, he defined Pontecorvo as a self-hating Jew (a charge not usually levelled in the communist press) who unwittingly reproduced anti-Semitic stereotypes. Drawing upon Lukacsian categories, his conclusions were that, since millions of Jews died in the gas chambers, making a Holocaust film where the Jew was the negative character was morally inappropriate, because a Jewish *kapo* was absolutely untypical.

La lunga notte del '43 and *Tutti a casa*

Alongside *Kapò*, the other film to premier at the 1960 Venice Film Festival was *La lunga notte del '43*. Taken from a 1955 short novella by Giorgio Bassani,⁸¹ *La lunga notte* is the story of one of the first massacres carried out by the RSI, when eleven antifascists and Jews were executed in Ferrara as a reprisal for the assassination of a local fascist. The mass shooting, ordered by the *gerarca* Carlo Aretusi (nicknamed '*sciagura*', or disgrace), is witnessed by the pharmacist Pino Barillari, who spends most of his days looking down the street from his window. However, when asked to give testimony in court in the postwar trial against Aretusi, Barillari's only answer is 'I was asleep.'

81 Bassani 1998d.

The film has some minor differences with Bassani's tale, and one is noteworthy. While Bassani's version dwelled on the victims, informing readers that four of them were Jewish (with surnames like Cases and Fano), in Vancini's film the victims' identities are left unsaid. The only reference is made in the final shot, where the commemorative plaque placed on the façade of the Este Castle shows their names. When asked about this choice the director Vancini explained that he did not want to make a chronicle of the massacre, but was more interested in stressing how all victims came from the Ferrarese 'middle class'.⁸² Thus his aim was to emphasise the consequences of bourgeois acquiescence during the war, and in the postwar years. In other words, in Vancini's intentions, a classification of the victims according to their class overrode other sources of identity.

The film's rendering of the victims' identities allowed reviewers to illustrate them with a variety of terms. They were 'political prisoners and antifascists',⁸³ 'antifascists',⁸⁴ 'eleven Ferrara citizens',⁸⁵ 'eleven civilians',⁸⁶ 'eleven innocents',⁸⁷ and 'members of the Resistance'.⁸⁸ Other than a simple display of hermeneutical variety, this list highlights the (often unconscious) mental categories through which the victims of fascist violence were framed: innocent victims, hence antifascists, hence members of the Resistance. The few exceptions to this all-political line of interpretation are also worth mentioning. While film scholar Leo Pestelli explicitly referred to the victims as

82 'Il personaggio "positivo"' 1960: 278–9.

83 Lino Micciché, 'Un coraggioso film di Vancini sull'Italia del 1943', *Avanti!* (30 August 1960): 2.

84 Paolo Valmarana, 'La lunga notte del '43', *Il Popolo del lunedì* (29 August 1960): 3; Ugo Casiraghi, "'La lunga notte del '43' ha rivelato un nuovo regista italiano: Florestano Vancini', *l'Unità* (29 August 1960): 8.

85 Alberto Moravia, 'Il fascista impunito', *L'Espresso*, 6/40 (2 October 1960): 23; Fink 1960b: 409.

86 Gambetti 1960: 26.

87 Giulio Cesare Castello in *Il Punto* (3 November 1960), quoted in 'La lunga notte del '43' 1960: 16.

88 Verdone 1960: 14.

'Jews and intellectuals',⁸⁹ two other reviews made implicit reference to the Jews. *Avvenire d'Italia* (which heralded the Catholic 'reconciliatory' and sanitised interpretation of the Resistance and of postwar Italy) claimed that racism was little felt at the time of the massacre.⁹⁰ *Il Giorno's* critic Pietro Bianchi, instead, made a reference to the vivacity of Ferrara's Jewish community.⁹¹ In other words, the film and these two latter reviews implicitly mourn the loss of part of Ferrara's Jewish community without ever verbalising it.

The overwhelming majority of the comments about *La lunga notte* focused on other themes. One was the fact that the film stressed how the massacre was perpetrated by Italian members of the RSI. Thus, the film was in itself a challenge to the established narrative of Italians as merely passive executioners of Nazi criminal orders.⁹² A second was the denunciation of 1950s Italy's oblivion of its recent past. When the son of one of the victims, who has moved to Switzerland, returns to visit Ferrara in 1960, he meets and shakes hands with the killer of his father, thus symbolising Italians' preference for a comfortable amnesia over justice.⁹³ Following a recurrent pattern, reviewers most often used the film as a springboard for the discussion of current issues. The third major theme of debate was the

89 Leo Pestelli, 'Felice esordio di un giovane regista', *Stampa Sera* (30 August 1960): 3.

90 Giovan Battista Cavallaro, "'La lunga notte del '43' prolungata sino al 1960', *L'Avvenire d'Italia del lunedì* (29 August 1960): 7.

91 Pietro Bianchi, 'La Ferrara '43 di un regista troppo giovane', *Il Giorno* (29 August 1960): 8.

92 Flavio Dolcetti, 'Vancini: "il mio film vuole essere un invito a non dimenticare"', *l'Unità* (15 September 1960): 5; Casiraghi "'Lunga notte". Years later, Vancini recalled how *La lunga notte* was the first film to openly show the civil war in which Italians killed each other; see Martini 2003: 22.

93 Lanocita 'Rassegna cinematografica'; d. z. [Dario Zanelli], "'La lunga notte del '43' di Florestano Vancini', *il Resto del Carlino* (15 September 1960): 6; Moravia 'Fascista'; Paolo Spriano, 'Cinema e antifascismo', *l'Unità* (25 September 1960): 3; Fink 1960a: 206; Gian Maria Guglielmino in *Gazzetta del Popolo* (29 August 1960), and Jean De Baroncelli in *Le Monde* (30 August 1960), quoted in 'La lunga notte del '43' 1960: 14–15; Pestelli 'Felice esordio'; Aristarco 1960: 452; Verdone 1960: 14.

perceived continuity between the film's antifascist message and the heated Italian political context of that year 1960. The communist press was particularly active in this sense, drawing parallels between fascist violence and the killings during the riots of 1960,⁹⁴ and claiming continuity between the victims of the latter and the former.⁹⁵ The equivalence established between those killed during a demonstration, and people rounded up in their homes and executed is historically problematic. But it conveys a sense of urgency that helps to illuminate the issues at stake in the debate over antifascism at the turn of the 1960s. And it provides one major explanation for some of its generalisations. The political use of antifascism in the present was important in determining the narratives about the whole war experience. The emphasis on the ideological-political (or economic-social) aspects implicitly led to erase the victims' identity, and focus on an important but historically incomplete condemnation of perpetrators and bystanders.⁹⁶

But the political strategy was not the only one at play. Another important long-term factor was the established Italian cultural tradition of exorcising the 'other' by means of inclusion within a Christian (ostensibly) universalistic paradigm.⁹⁷ Film scholar Guido Fink has recently borrowed an image from the film *Tutti a casa* to symbolise the broader invisibility of Jews in Italian postwar cinema.⁹⁸ The film is a bittersweet comedy whose protagonists are a group of Italian soldiers crossing the country and attempting to survive after the demise of the army following the armistice.⁹⁹ In their journey they befriend a runaway Jewish girl. Moved by her story of persecution, they try to help her by disguising her identity. The rationale

94 Rubens Tedeschi, 'Ferrara: dalle 'lunghe notti' ai giorni della nuova Resistenza', *l'Unità* (1 September 1960): 3.

95 Muzii 1960: 53.

96 The Catholic press was alarmed by this aspect of the film, which they perceived as an 'offensive' and angst-ridden attack on the 'Italian civil truce' of the 1950s; see Valmarana 'Lunga notte'; and Giovan Battista Cavallaro, 'Un primo bilancio', *L'Osservatore Romano* (4 September 1960): 5.

97 On this aspect, see Feinstein 2004.

98 Fink 1999.

99 Comencini 1960.

for their kindness is explained by one of them who, in his humble Venetian dialect, tells her '*siamo tutti cristiani*' ('we are all Christians', meaning we are all human beings).

Fink saw in this sequence a (perhaps unconscious) paradigmatic example of an intention to negate diversity among Italians in the name of a Christian superiority that went beyond sheer numerical dominance.¹⁰⁰ Fink's argument suggests that the representation of the persecution of the Jews not only served as a springboard for the presentation of a positive non-Jewish figure, but that the price to be paid for this sympathetic and inclusive representation of the Jews was the disempowerment of their very diversity. The episode of the Jewish girl in *Tutti a casa* was one of the film's highlights and was praised by the majority of the (few) reviews.¹⁰¹ But no mention was made of the points raised by Fink in 1999 – not even by Fink himself in his review written at the time.¹⁰² While these two different readings made by the same author in two different historical circumstances are proof of the importance of contextualization, it is worth stressing one further point. Reviews noted that *Tutti a casa* was an Ulyssean epic in which viewers could identify myriad narrative tropes about the war:¹⁰³ heroism, cowardice, the black market, hunger, desperation, fascist thugs, but also the persecution and deportation of the Jews. In other words, by 1960, the Holocaust was part of the broader Italian narrative of the war.¹⁰⁴

100 Fink 1999: 84.

101 Lan. [Arturo Lanocita], 'Tutti a casa – Pelle di serpente', *Corriere della Sera* (3 November 1960): 6; Laura 1961: 72; Fink 1961: 160.

102 Fink 1961. His argument was that *Tutti a casa* did not try to explain that the chaos and desperation of 1943 were the necessary outcome of the previous twenty years of regime.

103 Alberto Moravia, 'L'Ulisse dell'8 settembre', *L'Espresso*, 6/46 (13 November 1960): 31.

104 The same year saw the production of two documentaries, which nonetheless received little critical attention and were poorly distributed. These were *Ceneri della memoria* (*Ashes of Memory*, Alberto Caldana, 1960) and *16 ottobre 1943* (Ansano Giannarelli, 1960). The first, presented at the 1960 Venice Film Festival, drew a parallel between the Holocaust and the resurgent anti-Semitism of the "swastika wave". The juxtaposition of the two events was meant to stimulate viewers to counter resurgent anti-

L'oro di Roma

The following year the first feature film about an Italian Jewish community during the Holocaust was finally produced. Released in December 1961, *L'oro di Roma* reconstructs the life of Rome's Jewish community in the weeks between the extortion of fifty kilograms of gold ordered by Herbert Kappler on 25 September 1943, and the roundup of 16 October. The timing for the release of the film was fortunate. After months of press coverage, the Eichmann trial ended on 15 December. In the same short period, the release of *Judgment at Nuremberg* (Stanley Kramer) in Europe was followed by the press, on the wave of interest aroused by the Eichmann case.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, Renzo De Felice's history of Italian Jews under Fascism had recently become a much talked about cultural and political case, containing embarrassing references to past anti-Semitic writings by certain politicians who remained still active at the time.¹⁰⁶ In short, there was a potential market interest for *L'oro di Roma*. However, the film was not commercially successful and, although it received some attention in film journals, it went almost completely unnoticed in the daily press.

Directed by communist film-maker Carlo Lizzani, the film aspires to historical accuracy,¹⁰⁷ representing the Roman Jewish community from

Semitism. See Cincotti 1960: 47–8. Giannarelli's documentary was a twelve-minute long reconstruction of the events that led to the round-up of Rome's Jews in October 1943; see Carlo di Carlo, 'Il cortometraggio italiano antifascista', *Centrofilm*, 26–7 (August–September 1961), partially reproduced in 'Il cinema di Ansano Giannarelli' n.d.

105 As an example, see Arturo Lanocita, 'I berlinesi sono stati scossi dal film sul processo ai processi', *Corriere della Sera* (16 December 1961): 3.

106 See Domenico Bartoli, 'Come avvenne in Italia la campagna contro gli ebrei', *Corriere della Sera* (29 December 1961): 3; Paolo Spriano, 'Gli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo', *l'Unità* (5 January 1962): 3.

107 For example, the film accurately depicts the Vatican's offer to contribute to meet the quota as a loan and not as a gift, contrary to the popular understanding of the time. On this episode, see Zuccotti 2002: 154. The book version of the script also contained articles on the history and representation of the Holocaust; see Vento 1961a.

within and presenting a wide range of reactions to the persecution.¹⁰⁸ In so doing, *L'oro di Roma* is characterised by a series of dualisms: acquiescence versus resistance, solidarity versus egoism, young versus old, as well as class divisions. The main dualism is embodied by David and Giulia, both living in the ghetto but separated by class and by their different response to persecution. David is a young working-class man who unsuccessfully tries to smuggle arms into the ghetto, and eventually joins the Resistance. Giulia, in turn, is a university student who tries to escape persecution by getting engaged to Massimo, a young, upper class Christian. Giulia accepts baptism in order to appease Massimo's conservative parents and eventually moves in with him. Both David and Giulia renounce Judaism and leave the ghetto, the former by joining the Resistance and killing Nazis, the latter by converting to Catholicism and moving up the social hierarchy. David's choice is moral and for the greater good, while Giulia's is ultimately individualistic and motivated by a degree of opportunism. For this reason, David does not look back and hence survives, while Giulia returns to the ghetto during the arrests and reconciles herself with Judaism *in extremis*. In so doing, she shares her fate with all other Jews who complied with Nazi demands and refused to fight back, from the conciliating leader of the community, to the elder accustomed to Gentile harassment, to the pious Rabbi who commends himself to God.¹⁰⁹

In other words, the film depicts no possibility of rescue within Judaism. Partly, this was due to some unintentional, but no less deeply-rooted prejudice. The extent of this prejudice emerges not only from the film itself, but also from comments made by the director. For example, according to Lizzani, the Jews were unable to react because of their age-long acquiescence in persecution.¹¹⁰ Similarly, Lizzani interpreted difficulties experienced during production in finding Roman Jews willing to retell their stories and participate as a sign of specifically Jewish conformism that made

108 'L'oro di Roma' 1961a: 50.

109 Lichtner 2008: 57–8.

110 'L'oro di Roma' 1961a; 'L'oro di Roma' 1961b; 'Incontri con i registi italiani' 1962: 6.

them choose oblivion.¹¹¹ In a slightly more articulate manner, the producer Alfonso Sansone detected different generational patterns of hostility to the reconstruction of those events. In his view, while younger generations rejected the passivity of Roman Jews – apart from David, who was in this sense more attuned to the political climate of the early 1960s – the older generations were wary of revisiting painful memories.¹¹²

As Giacomo Lichtner has correctly noted, these poorly phrased comments should not be simply seen as anti-Semitic. Lizzani clearly misread the lack of an armed resistance by the Roman Jews as the result of a specifically Jewish religious and cultural characteristic.¹¹³ However, two other factors explain his approach better than outright anti-Semitism. The first was Lizzani's Marxist (and in Italy also Crocean) view of all forms of religion as an inherently conservative atavistic residue. The second factor was the centrality of the Resistance paradigm in leftist discourse. In the heated context of the early 1960s described in the first part of this chapter, the Resistance became the lens through which the left made sense of the past as well as the present. Italians were spurred to resist conservatism in the present as they had done in the past, at least in the mythical narrative of the Resistance then strong in large sections of Italian culture.

The parallel continuously drawn between the armed Resistance as a founding myth still working as a spur for action in the present on the one hand, and the unarmed Jewish response on the other was read in Manichean terms as a complete lack of opposition, thus obliterating the different conditions faced by Jews and non-Jews during the Nazi occupation.¹¹⁴ In this sense, the film was a reflection of its time, as similar arguments were put forward by scholars such as Raul Hilberg and Hannah Arendt in their evaluation of the role played by the heads of the *Judenräte* during the Holocaust.¹¹⁵

111 'Incontri con i registi italiani' 1962: 6; Valiani 1961: 57.

112 Valiani 1961: 57–9; 'Incontri con i registi italiani' 1962: 6.

113 Lichtner 2008: 58.

114 Vento 1961b.

115 Hilberg 1961; Arendt 1963.

Very much in tune with these themes, *Loro di Roma* was not primarily about the persecution of the Jews, but about the reactions of the Jewish community, and the consequence of their supposed failure to resist. For this reason, the film's main 'message' was interpreted in the introduction to the screenplay as a 'violent indictment' of the ghetto Jews and their leaders, who did not find the strength to fight back, as their coreligionists in Warsaw had done.¹¹⁶ The history of the events leading to the deportation of Rome's Jews was at odds with the politically motivated emphasis on the Resistance dominating left-wing narratives. This contrast between historical events on the one hand, and the contemporary political climate on the other, can contribute to explain some of the harsh tones present in the debates around *Loro di Roma*.

The centrality of the Resistance in the film was reflected in reviews in cinema journals. The Catholic *Rivista del cinematografo* criticised what they saw as a 'reevaluation' of Jews – effected by showing their contribution to the Resistance – as inappropriate.¹¹⁷ *Cinemasessanta* noted that it was not clear in the film whether David incarnated a potential Zionist hero, or whether he stood for all those Italian Jews who fought Fascism in the Resistance.¹¹⁸ This ambiguity was made explicit by the left-wing *Cinema nuovo*, which saw in David less a reference to history than a reflection of a contemporary self-critique going on within the Jewish community about the events of those fateful months.¹¹⁹ In this sense, David was very much a Jew of the 1960s.

The film shows many instances of solidarity between the Jews and the rest of the population, from the woman who offers her golden cross for the collection, to Massimo's marriage with Giulia, which illustrates that

116 Vento 1961b: 31–2. To some degree, this Italian understanding of the Holocaust is similar to that produced around the same time in Israel, where Zionist rhetoric linked the Holocaust to heroism and resistance; see Segev 2000: 345–57, 421–39.

117 Giaccio 1962.

118 m. a. 1962: 56.

119 Ferrero 1962. For a historical account of the October roundup, see Zuccotti 1996: 101–19.

the Jews were completely assimilated with the non-Jewish population.¹²⁰ However, while explicitly affirmed, this assimilation is also implicitly questioned. One of the producers claimed that in his view, when David kills his first German soldier after having joined the partisans, he (re)acts as a Roman rather than as a Jew.¹²¹ This initiation into partisan life is sealed by the partisans' leader, who states 'you are one of us, David.' Considering the mythical narrative of the Resistance as a popular liberation movement and as the supposed response of 'true' Italians' to 'Nazi-Fascism', it is not clear whether 'one of us' refers to the partisans or to the national community. This implicit claim that inclusion implies abandoning Jewish specificity renders of *L'oro di Roma* a left-wing and secular version of the conversionist message proposed years before by *L'ebreo errante*.

Television

The turn of 1960s thus witnessed sporadic references to the Holocaust in Italian cinema and occasionally on television. The most remarkable example of this period was the four-episode documentary by Liliana Cavani *Storia del Terzo Reich*, which aired on the recently instituted second RAI channel between November 1961 and October 1962. While Italian historians of Nazi Germany of the time dedicated only passing references to the Holocaust,¹²² in Cavani's *Storia del Terzo Reich* the persecution of the Jews held a central place. The programme followed a chronological structure, and tried to explain Nazism by focusing mainly on its mythology. Through a thoughtful, and at the time innovative, use of archival footage, the documentary linked the horrors of the regime to its fascination with Germanic folklore. One aim of this construction was to present Nazism as

an anti-Christian regime inherently scornful of the Ten Commandments. It followed from this that the Catholic Church had merely tried to reach a compromise made necessary by the persecution of its members. Despite this rather selective interpretation, *Storia del Terzo Reich* was an important step in the construction of public memory of the Holocaust in Italy, showing viewers graphic images of the camps for the first time on television, and situating the Holocaust at the centre of its narrative.

This important, albeit isolated, documentary was followed in 1965 by a number of other programmes commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the end of the war. *Europa per la libertà* (Europe for Freedom, Emmanuele Milano and Giovanni Salvi, Programma Nazionale, 2 and 9 April, 21.00) and *Il giorno della pace* (The Day of Peace, Liliana Cavani, Programma Nazionale, 7 May, 21.00) framed the Holocaust within discussions about European memory. Both reports were not so much concerned with informing viewers about the history of those events, as with the way in which they were remembered. They provided viewers with a redemptive narrative of the war and its aftermath. In particular, the first episode of *Europa per la libertà* presented a variant of the pacification of European memory that is amongst the major themes of this book. It told the story of three women: a survivor of Auschwitz who lost her family, including her son, in the Holocaust, a German mother and her son, born after the conflict; and an Italian woman from the South, who dedicated herself to reconstructing the bodies of dead soldiers of all sides during the war. These stories constituted an attempt to move beyond the European tragedy and look towards a future of unity that included West Germany. In this pacified European memory, Italy was significantly presented as above the fray, and personified by the charitable female figure of mamma Lucia. In 1967, just a week after the broadcast of 'Missione Wiesenthal', RAI aired an episode of the cultural programme *Segnalibro* (Bookmark, Enzo Convalli, Programma Nazionale, 8 May, 18.45) dedicated to the Holocaust, offering another interview with Simon Wiesenthal, as well as a report on the controversies

120 Valiani 1961: 57.

121 Gaetano 'Giuliani' De Negri in Vento 1961a: 122.

122 Collotti 1962.

generated by Peter Weiss' *The Investigation*,¹²³ and an interview with the French author of the novel *Treblinka* Jean François Steiner.¹²⁴

I sequestrati di Altona and Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa ...

The use of the Holocaust by television to put forward messages about current issues such as European identity demonstrates that Holocaust symbolism was gaining currency and could be used outside of its historical context. The final two films discussed in this chapter exemplify this development.

Based on a play by Jean-Paul Sartre,¹²⁵ *I sequestrati di Altona* (The Condemned of Altona, Vittorio De Sica, 1962) is the story of the Krupp-like von Gerlach family, led by the terminally ill patriarch Albrecht. His son Werner shuns involvement with the firm, for the role it played in the Holocaust. His other son Franz, who had been in charge of the company during the war while also fighting on the Eastern front, has been hiding since 1945 in the basement of the family's Altona estate. Franz is attended by his sister Leni, who feeds his paranoia by leading him to believe that Germany is still at war. Franz's encounter with Werner's wife Johanna moves him to abandon his hiding place. Shocked by the reality of 1960s Germany, he kills Albrecht and takes his own life.

The major response to the film was in the communist press, as an indictment of West Germany's lack of conscience of past guilt and as an exposé of its continuity with Nazism, thus becoming part of the ongoing

123 Weiss 1966 received praise and criticism for subsuming the Holocaust to a Marxist critique of capitalism, thus establishing a direct link between capitalism and Auschwitz, and overlooking the specificity of German anti-Semitism; see Huyssen 1980: 133.

124 Steiner 1967. On the heated debates generated by the novel in France, see Moyn 2005.

125 Sartre 1960.

ing campaign orchestrated by the Soviet bloc to discredit the country.¹²⁶ However, what went completely unnoticed by reviewers is that the film is also filled with references to the Holocaust (for example, the plaque positioned inside the von Gerlach estate commemorating the Jews who died there as slave workers). Here again the Holocaust could feature as a recognisable sub-plot in a film concerned with other topics. In the mid-1960s, it was clear that Holocaust imagery could be universalised and used to convey other messages.

This was the case of *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa ...* (Sandra, Luchino Visconti, 1965). The film is the story of Sandra, a member of the upper class Wald-Luzzatti family, whose patriarch died in Auschwitz. We learn that at the end of the war, Sandra moved to Switzerland and married an American. A commemoration to honour the memory of Sandra's dead father provides an occasion for the couple to visit the old family estate, where Sandra and her brother Gianni spent their youth. Sandra also suspects that her mother and her current husband denounced professor Luzzatti to the Nazis. The death of Sandra's father is not the only morbid aspect of her life. In the old house she resumes her incestuous relationship with Gianni. The film's tragic ending sees Gianni commit suicide while Sandra is attending the ceremony in memory of their father.

As so often the case with Visconti, the film recounts the destruction of a family presented as an assemblage of disparate literary influences, from Sophocles to Leopardi, to Proust and Bassani.¹²⁷ In this case, these literary references are deployed to support a story imbued with traditional anti-

126 Ugo Casiraghi, 'De Sica assalta il "miracolo" tedesco', *l'Unità* (1 November 1962): 7; Di Giammatteo 1962; Autera 1962; Cosulich 1962; Bruno 1963. However, scepticism of Germany's democratic recovery was also widespread in Britain, as shown in Rosenfeld 2005: 216.

127 Pietro Bianchi, 'Un film memorabile pieno di furore', *Il Giorno* (4 September 1965): 15; Lino Micciché, '"Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa" di Visconti: opera di cultura se non di poesia', *Avanti!* (4 September 1965): 5; Dario Zanelli, 'L'elettra ebrea di Visconti', *il Resto del Carlino* (4 September 1965): 6; Lietta Tornabuoni, 'Ai confini dell'amore', *L'Europeo*, 21/37 (12 September 1965): 60; Marco Guidotti, 'Il regista soddisfatto incoraggiava i critici', *L'Avvenire d'Italia* (4 September 1965): 5.

Semitism. As Sandra's mother (who is not Jewish) reminds her, Sandra is corrupt and vicious because she has inherited her father's 'Jewish blood.' The film would have us believe that the presence of 'Jewish blood' in the family motivates Sandra's morbid relationship with Gianni and with the memory of her father.¹²⁸ Many critics found this link between Jewishness and moral impurity to be an equivocal and irritating trace of traditional anti-Semitism.¹²⁹ Moreover, they criticised the film's use of the Holocaust as an artificial backdrop for the unfolding of its melodrama,¹³⁰ and as an inappropriate subordination of the extermination to the tragedy of the two siblings.¹³¹

While the film tells us more about Visconti's own obsessions than about the perception of Jews in Italian culture, *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa ...* also illustrates the increasing presence of the Holocaust in Italian films. However, these references did not lead to a modification of interpretive frameworks about the war, the Resistance, or the role played by Italians. This lack of confrontation made it possible for observers to continue to discuss the Holocaust as something unrelated to Italy, to pair the persecution of the Jews with non-Jewish solidarity, and to use the Holocaust as a metaphor for utterly unrelated issues.

128 Calderone 1965: 38. See also Brunetta 1965; Giovan Battista Cavallaro, 'Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa', *L'Avvenire d'Italia* (1 October 1965): 5; 'Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa nell'itinerario di Visconti' 1966.

129 Micciché, "'Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa'"; see also 'Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa' 1966; de Santis 1965: 652; Quaglietti 1966: 42; Ugo Casiraghi, 'Un oscuro dramma di autodistruzione', *l'Unità* (4 September 1965): 7.

130 Marcus 2007: 43. Visconti himself candidly admitted that the Holocaust was marginal to the story; Rusconi 1965: 11.

131 Verdone 1965: 3; Gambetti 1965: 522.

CHAPTER FOUR

The 'New Discourse' and the Universalisation of the Holocaust

The use of the Holocaust as a metaphor was exploited even further by the films of the 1970s, especially those belonging to the so-called 'new discourse.' The discussion of films and TV programmes in the ten years between 1966 and 1976 was informed by two different themes. The first was the long-established reference to antifascism and the Resistance addressed in the films *Andremo in città* (We'll Go to The City, Nelo Risi, 1966) and *Diario di un italiano*. The Jewish characters in these two films are presented in their specificity as victims, rather than being equated to members of the armed Resistance, or being overshadowed by them. This shift was interpreted by reviewers as a sign of a growing awareness of Jewish specificity, and as a response to the need for a fresh approach to the subject of the Second World War that went beyond mythologising the heroism of Resistance fighters.

The second theme was a departure from established narratives. Certain films produced in the late 1960s and early 1970s sought not simply to analyse the 'good side' from a different perspective. Rather, they shifted entirely to focus on the representation of the perpetrators, or the ambiguities of the 'grey zone', giving life to what Saul Friedländer has called a 'new discourse' on Fascism in cinema.¹ Films like *La caduta degli dei*, *Il portiere di notte*, and *Pasqualino Settebellezze* participated in a broader process of reappraisal of the recent past, and questioned established political and aesthetic dogmas – in particular the neorealist tradition. The context in which these films were received was marked by two sets of changes that

1 See Friedländer 1986. He articulated some of these ideas further in Friedländer 1992. For discussions of this theme introduced by Friedländer, see Trommler 2003: 148–9; Flinn 2004: 243–4.

influenced Holocaust debates. For the left the 1967 and 1973 wars were of key importance. Equally the 'new left' developed a new and significant critique of established narratives of Nazism, Fascism and the Resistance.

The Jewish state and the Italian left

Since the end of the Second World War, a sizeable part of Italian Jewry (especially among the young generations) sympathised with the left.² The communist and socialist parties supported the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 in the name of shared sufferings brought about by Fascism and Nazism, and in accord with the Soviet Union's own support of the Jewish state, seen as a means to undermine British influence in the Middle East.³ The DC government was less enthusiastic. Its cautious policy in the Middle East meant that Italy would only officially recognise Israel in 1950.⁴ However, thereafter the policy of the many DC-led Italian coalition governments was to maintain a careful balance between Israel and the Arab world.

In contrast, the left-wing parties experienced different phases in their relationship with Israel and the Italian Jewish community, and here the influence of the international context was more direct. Communist support in the late 1940s and early 1950s helped to build a dialogue with part of the Jewish community, focussed on possible affinities between communism and Jewish culture.⁵ The first caesura came in 1956, with the Suez Crisis.

2 Schwarz 2004: 97–8.

3 Cingoli 1989: 17; Santese 2007; Tarquini 2007: 165.

4 Donno 1998: 170; Riccardi 2006: 14–20; Abadi 2002: 67.

5 An example of this at times lively debate is represented by Luciano Tas' 1955 proposal to integrate Marxist thought within Jewish tradition, and the reply by Augusto Segre that only Israel, Zionism, and religious tradition are at the centre of Jewish identity. See Luciano Tas, 'Pensiero ebraico e pensiero moderno', *Israel* (10 March 1955): 1–2, and Augusto Segre, 'Cultura e assimilazione', *Israel* (21 April 1955): 7.

Following the Soviet Union, the PSI and the PCI sided against Israel in favour of Nasser's Egypt, while the influential Jewish journal *Israel* denied the possibility of being communists and Zionists at the same time.⁶ In the successive years, the PCI maintained an interpretive framework centred on presenting Israel as a pawn of Western 'imperialism'.⁷ The communist party pursued a twofold policy. On the one hand, it criticised Israel and approached Arab national movements. On the other, it upheld the condemnation of anti-Semitism as part of 'Nazi-fascist' barbarism, and therefore failed to investigate its roots in broader Italian culture, proving still less concerned to criticise its resurgence in the Soviet Union.⁸

The socialists offered a less monolithic picture. In the second part of the 1950s, sections of the party maintained support for the Jewish state, although the official party line was critical of Israel. This split emerged in 1958, when the tenth anniversary of the Jewish state generated critical articles in *Avanti!* and eulogies in *Critica Sociale*, both of which were owned by the PSI.⁹ From 1960 onwards, under Pietro Nenni's leadership, the PSI shifted toward a pro-Israel position, resulting from the party's severing of ties with the communists and participation in the centre-left governments.¹⁰

It was against the background of this political and cultural context that the 1967 War impacted on Italy. As in Israel and in the United States,¹¹

6 G.R., 'Erez Israel e gli Ebrei d'Italia', *Israel* (6 December 1956): 1.

7 Luzzatto 1997: 1890. The Communist press shifted the entire responsibility for the conflict onto France and the United Kingdom, describing Israel as an appendix of those two powers; see Riccardi 2006: 131.

8 Riccardi 2006: 155–7.

9 The origins of the debate lay in the publication of an important special issue of the journal *Il Ponte* dedicated to the event, which hailed the existence of the state of Israel as a democratic revolution that the left should support; see Enriquez Agnoletti 1958: 1525.

10 Tarquini 2007: 193–4. As a result of this shift, in the early 1960s the publishers *Opere Nuove* and *Edizioni di Comunità*, which enjoyed a close relation to the PSI, released a number of works on the Israeli case, such as Braunthal 1958, Meister 1964, Segre 1962, Eytan 1960), *Lo stato d'Israele: discussioni e problemi* 1963.

11 See Segev 2000: 387–95, and Novick 1999: 148–51.

the Italian Jewish community lived through the weeks prior to the war and at its outcome with a mixture of anxiety, relief, and communal pride. The sweeping victory achieved by the Israeli army set the foundations for a process of revision of Jewish representation and self-representation.¹² The 1967 War did not directly affect perceptions of the Holocaust in Italy.¹³ However, it situated Israel at the centre of the political and cultural map, and provoked a fracture between large sections of the Jewish community and equally large sections of the left (both the PCI and the extra-parliamentarian groups) that has never fully healed.¹⁴ After 1967, although it never questioned the existence of Israel, the PCI press campaigned against its policy, likening it to American imperialism in Vietnam and widely adopting the 'yesterday's victims-today's perpetrators' argument.¹⁵ This position was rejected by the majority of the public opinion, which at the time sided predominantly with Israel,¹⁶ and by Jewish public figures such as Primo Levi.¹⁷ Moreover, it was criticised by a PCI Jewish leader like Umberto Terracini,¹⁸ as well as by some PCI militants,¹⁹ and led to

12 Toscano 2003: 295.

13 On the centrality of 1967 as a watershed in Jewish narratives of the Holocaust, see Cole 2000: 9; Linenthal 1995: 9; Morgan 2001: 79–90; Segev 2000: 478; Zertal 2005: 113–14.

14 A similar phenomenon developed in West Germany, and has been discussed in Herf 2004b: 52; see also Levy and Sznajder 2006: 99. For a broader contextualisation of the shifting relations between Jews and the left, see Mendes, 1999.

15 A fitting example is Alberto Jacoviello, 'Israele *über alles*?', *l'Unità* (21 February 1970): 14.

16 See Riccardi 2006: 251, 258–9.

17 See Levi 1997b.

18 See 'Il nostro giornale e il Medio Oriente. Una lettera del compagno Umberto Terracini e la risposta del compagno Gian Carlo Pajetta', *l'Unità* (25 July 1969): 3.

19 See the exchange between the reader Anna Piperno and the newspaper columnist Piero Della Seta in 'Non il "senso dell'ebraismo" ma il "senso dell'umanità"', *l'Unità* (25 June 1967): 12, and the letters by Leo Levi and Luciano Ascoli and Pavolini's rejoinder in 'La sinistra e i problemi degli ebrei', *Rinascita* (17 July 1970): 31. See also Luciano Ascoli, 'Polemica sul sionismo' *Rinascita*, 39 (6 October 1967): 11–12 and Ascoli 1970, which was harshly criticised by Luca Pavolini, 'Recensione a Luciano Ascoli', *Rinascita* (3 July 1970): 25. On Terracini and Ascoli, see Riccardi 2006: 422–39.

heated controversies among Jewish communists.²⁰ Debates in Jewish publications and in the mainstream press closely followed the many events involving Israel.²¹

This split between significant sections of the Jewish community and the communist left resulted in the establishment of two opposing approaches. Jewish debates slowly but permanently started to shift from supporting universalistic liberalism to emphasising Jewish particularism and diversity.²² For the PCI and especially the 'new left', the Middle-Eastern conflicts did not facilitate discussing the Holocaust. From a communist perspective, the Holocaust was politically non-profitable, not least because it was widely used both in Israel and in the United States to whip up support for Israel's policies.²³ In the politically charged 1970s, discussions of Jewish-related themes were often read as a disguised form of support for Israel.²⁴ These developments strengthened the tendency amongst communists to refer to the Holocaust predominantly in reference to the antifascist and anti-Nazi rhetoric of contemporary political debates, and rarely as a distinct event. As a result, the Holocaust was not a primary concern in the majority of public debate on Nazism in the period analysed in this chapter, at a time

20 See Piero Della Seta, 'Lo Stato di Israele e gli ebrei nel mondo', *l'Unità* (14 June 1967): 3; Silvio Ortona, 'Rifutare di porsi sul piano dell'odio', *l'Unità* (25 June 1967): 12; Emilio Sereni, 'Replica alle obiezioni', *Rinascita* (21 July 1967): 10–11. Many Jewish militants left the PCI during this controversy. Their stories have yet to be fully analysed; see Riccardi 2006: 301, n 422.

21 See the issues of the journal *Ha-Tikva* (organ of the Italian Young Jews' Federation) from June 1967 to April 1968, and the articles by Luciano Tas, 'Gli ebrei in Italia oggi', *Shalom* (October 1969), and 'Pas d'amis à droite', *Shalom* (December 1969), a debate resumed in Toscano 2003: 295–7. See also Poliakov 1971.

22 Toscano 2003: 295, Bidussa 1993. However, this movement did not go uncontested among Jewish intellectuals. An example is the troubled critique of Israeli policy in the Middle East made by Fortini 1967.

23 See Novick 1999: 157; Segev 2000: 399.

24 Molinari 1995: 70–1 references the example of the far-left newspaper *Il quotidiano dei Lavoratori* (part of the galaxy of publications of those years), which defined the broadcast in 1973 of the TV-Kolossal *Mosè: la legge del deserto* (Moses the Lawgiver, Gianfranco De Bosio) with Burt Lancaster as a 'confirmation of Jewish supremacy' and the 'legitimation of Zionist aggression against the Arabs.'

when fascist- and Nazi-related themes circulated widely. The overall effect was the inflation of references to Nazism and Fascism on the one hand, and either a placing of the Holocaust in the background or its extreme universalisation and relativisation on the other.

The long 1968 and the crisis of Resistance-centred narratives

Fascism and Nazism were constantly evoked in the cultural and political arena during the 1968 revolt and the long wave marking its immediate legacy throughout the 1970s in Italy. Although the Holocaust as such was entirely marginal in the students' and workers' movement, the shift of Fascism and Nazism from the historical background to the polemical foreground influenced the ways these historical phenomena were represented in films and in the ways in which these films were received.

The 1968 revolt has been defined as proof that the generational gap had widened to the point of rupture across the Western world. Its eruption had an impact on the social and cultural development of the following decade.²⁵ In continental Europe, the dialectic between generations overlapped with the radical critique of traditional left-wing parties made by the splinter groups stemming from the protest. In Italy, the emergence of 'new' social subjects (such as women, teenagers and students) brought about the introduction of new theoretical tools.²⁶ Interest in the works of Herbert Marcuse and the Frankfurt School placed psychology and sex side by side with traditional economical and political themes.²⁷ This body of work and especially Wilhelm Reich's emphasis on the alleged link between Fascism and perverse sexuality gained wide currency in the Italian context. Another important aspect in terms of the contextualisation

25 Marwick 1998: 5.

26 Tarrow 1989.

27 Flores and De Bernardi 2003: 107–8.

of some of the films studied in this chapter, is the rejection of dominant Marxist historicist aesthetics incarnated by Georg Lukács' emphasis on realism. As a result of this latter shift, many of the films discussed in this chapter espouse an anti-realist perspective and use sex in their representation of Nazism.

In this complex context, the memory of Fascism and the Resistance were contested even within the left. For the 'new left', the Resistance was more an interrupted revolution than a national liberation movement,²⁸ and the continuities with Fascism marred the image of postwar Italy.²⁹ Moreover, persistent threats of military putsches fed by domestic factors during the so-called 'strategy of tension' and by the international examples of Greece and Chile resulted in the inflation of the adjective 'fascist'.³⁰

Thirty years after the Second World War, Fascism and Nazism were characterised in the Italian cultural scene by a distancing movement in chronological, generational, and thematic terms. At the same time, however, concerns about political developments put Fascism right at the centre of the ideological and cultural debate. Because of this the interest in the history of Fascism was influenced by both a distant memory and a reoccurring political threat. In other words, Fascism was, at the same time, a historical past and a political present.³¹ As a result, the topics of Fascism and Nazism circulated widely in Italian public discussions across a variety of different media, from history-writing to television, documentaries, and feature films. Holocaust memory was conditioned by this context.

28 Ganapini 1986; Focardi 2005: 24; De Luna 1995: 148; Ballone 1997: 417.

29 On the continuity between Fascism and postwar Italy, see Pavone 1995.

30 This phenomenon was far from being only Italian; see Allardyce 1979.

31 Ravetto 2001: 22.

TV divulgation

In the late 1960s and early 1970s there was increasing interest in the histories of Nazism and Fascism, and classic works by George Mosse, Ernst Nolte, Karl Dietrich Bracher, and Franz Neumann were translated.³² However, despite this interest, few book-length studies of Nazism were produced by Italian historians,³³ who were understandably more concerned with an analysis of Fascism.³⁴ Still less investigated was the theme of the Holocaust. As in previous decades, the survivors themselves acted as a substitute for historiography. In many of these texts, survivors' memoirs were corroborated by documents, and the Italian case was compared with other countries.³⁵

RAI participated in this growing interest, offering a number of documentaries and panel shows dedicated to Fascism, the war, and the Resistance. References to the Holocaust were often interspersed with these themes in these programmes. In 1972, two instalments of the programme *Passato prossimo* saw the broadcast of a two-hour reduced edition of Marcel Ophüls' controversial documentary *Le chagrin et la pitié* (The Sorrow and the Pity, 1971), which was causing heated debate in France at the time (and which was not shown on French television until 1981).³⁶ The communist newspaper *l'Unità* abrasively commented that RAI was outspoken and

32 Mosse 1968; Mosse 1975; Nolte 1966; Bracher 1973; Neumann 1977.

33 See Collotti 1962; Collotti 1964a; Collotti 1968, and Tranfaglia 1965.

34 It should be acknowledged that certain works tried to clarify the ongoing debate: Renzo De Felice 1970; Santarelli 1973; Tranfaglia 1973. Unexpected bestsellers were De Felice 2001 and Bocca 1976. However, the *Zeitgeist* is best conveyed by titles such as Kuhn 1973, and Grifone 1975.

35 Examples of these approaches are Pappalè 1973, and Millu and Fucile 1980; *Un mondo fuori dal mondo. Indagine DOXA fra i reduci dei campi nazisti* 1971. See also Jalla 2003: 140. But the most significant product of the period is Beccaria Rolfi and Bruzzone 1978, a work that situated itself at the junction of history of political deportation, oral history, and women's history.

36 See Crainz 1996: 58.

courageous, when it was a matter of exposing other countries' misdeeds, yet much less so when Italy was involved.³⁷

In a country with a low circulation of newspapers and books, TV became the main (and for much of the population the only) means of historical information. It is for this reason that 1970s Italian TV was imbued with a 'pedagogic' mission. Episodic dramas written with a matter-of-fact and educational style made their appearance. The best examples are the previously-mentioned series *Teatro-Inchiesta*; these included a number of dramas produced and broadcast between the late 1960s and early 1970s, many of which centred on Nazism and the Holocaust, such as the story of Simon Wiesenthal and of Nobel Peace Prize laureate Karl Von Ossietzky in Nazi Germany, Father Kolbe's life and death in Auschwitz, the Night of the Long Knives, the Nuremberg Trials, and the July 1944 Plot to kill Hitler.³⁸

Many of these programmes conveyed the idea of Resistance in a broad sense as a moral paradigm. In 1970, RAI aired *Il muro* (The Wall, Leandro Castellani, Programma Nazionale, 24 March, 21.00), and *Il sacrificio di Varsavia* (Warsaw's Sacrifice, Yannick Bellon, Secondo Programma, 22 July, 22.45). The former was a docudrama set in the Warsaw ghetto, the latter a more conventional documentary on the revolt in the Polish capital. Archival footage was accompanied by a voiceover by writer Carlo Cassola that informed viewers about the ghettoisation, exploitation, revolt, and extermination of Jews in the city, as well as describing Warsaw's own uprising in 1944. A further example of this tendency to screen stories of resistance was represented by the miniseries *La rosa bianca* (The White Rose, Alberto Negrin, Programma Nazionale, 4 and 11 February 1971, 21.30),³⁹ the story of the Christian anti-Nazi group *Die Weiße Rose* swept away by the regime in 1943. As the historian Nicola Gallarano has pointed out, it

37 Vice, 'Controcanele', *l'Unità* (20 September 1972): 7.

38 *Reato di stampa. Processo al giornalista Karl Von Ossietzky; Il numero dieci (Padre Kolbe); La notte dei lunghi coltelli; Progetto Norimberga; Il complotto di luglio.*

39 The film was watched by 3.5 million viewers, with a degree of satisfaction of 72/100, source 'La Resistenza italiana nei programmi della RAI', floppy-disk included in Crainz *et al.* 1996.

was mainly television that emphasised themes such as German resistance (perhaps for its dramatic tones), which had until this point been somewhat neglected by professional historians.⁴⁰

Television also contributed to heighten interest in the Nazi state. The 1970s saw the broadcasting of two documentaries on Albert Speer, whose 1970 memoir *Inside the Third Reich* had become a bestseller,⁴¹ and one each on Hermann Goering and Hitler.⁴² These programmes also informed viewers of Nazi crimes. Evidence of this came in the shape of an informative documentary on Dachau,⁴³ together with more original approaches. For example, as part of the *Teatro-Inchiesta* series, the Nuremberg trial was reconstructed in detail.⁴⁴ Thanks to the expertise of the adviser Arturo Carlo Jemolo, the programme highlighted the historical innovation represented by the trial while informing about Nazi crimes; the result was a notably accomplished product. The same series explored the heritage of Nazism further by reconstructing the experiment on obedience to authority conducted by Stanley Milgram at Yale following the Eichmann trial.⁴⁵

As these few examples indicate, the Holocaust in Italy was absent from these programmes. The sole and highly selective example of discussion of this theme was offered by an episode of the panel-show *Controcampo*, entitled 'Essere ebrei oggi', aired during the 1973 War. The debate saw the

40 Gallerano: 74.

41 Speer 1970. The programmes were *Boomerang. Ricerca in due sere* [Boomerang. Enquiry in Two Evenings], Paolo Gazzarra, Secondo Programma, 17 August 1971, 21.15; and *A carte scoperte con Albert Speer* [Cards on the Table with Albert Speer], Nelo Risi, Programma Nazionale, 9 July 1974, 21.35.

42 'Goering', Episode of *Sapere*, Alfonso Sterpellone. Programma Nazionale, 18 January 1975, 18.30; 'Hitler: chi era?' [Hitler: Who Was He?], episode of *Trent'anni dopo...io ricordo*, Enzo Biagi. Programma Nazionale, 28 January 1976, 20.40.

43 *Boomerang. Ricerca in due sere* [Boomerang. Enquiry in Two Evenings] Paolo Gazzarra. Secondo Programma. 27 April 1971. 21.20.

44 *Progetto Norimberga* [Nuremberg Project], Gianni Serra, Programma Nazionale, 13 and 15 April 1971, 21.00.

45 On the Milgram experiment, see Milgram 1974; the programme was *L'esperimento* [The Experiment], Dante Guardamagna, Programma Nazionale, 2 December 1971, 21.30. The adviser was social psychology professor Leonardo Ancona.

theme of fascist persecution of the Jews eloquently dismissed by the communists MPs Umberto Terracini and Sergio Segre with their claims that the racial laws were but a pretext to block the rise of socialism, and that the shock caused by 1938 was redeemed by the Resistance, a theme the next chapter deals with in more detail.

Andremo in città

Released in 1966, *Andremo in città* was the screen adaptation of the novel written four years earlier by Hungarian-born Holocaust survivor Edith Bruck.⁴⁶ The film was an Italian and Yugoslavian co-production. For this reason, while the novel was set in Hungary, the film was shot on location in Serbia. It tells the story of two siblings, seventeen-year old Lenka and her blind younger brother Misha. The children's mother dies early in the film, while their Jewish father has escaped a German camp and returned to the village, but is refused protection by some of his fellow villagers (most prominently one aristocratic landowner and collaborator). During a Nazi roundup, he sacrifices his life in order to save Ivan, Lenka's partisan fiancée. Meanwhile, Lenka does her best to spare Misha the horror and hardship of the occupation. By making good use of her brother's disability, she hides the reality of violence from him, as well as their own persecution as Jews. On the train to deportation, Lenka tells Misha that they are going to the city where his blindness will be cured. As Marcus has noted, the deception of Misha set a model for that of Giosué in *La vita è bella*.⁴⁷

The schematic presentation of the characters and their roles was almost unanimously stressed in the press as a weakness. One review criticised the clichéd didacticism in the presentation of the characters of cruel Nazis and

46 Bruck.

47 Marcus 2007: 45.

brave partisans, oppressed Jews and heartless landowners.⁴⁸ However, other reviewers noted that the film was not simply a stereotyped representation of the Resistance. Co-written by the director, Edith Bruck, the Polish screenwriter Jerzy Stawinski, and the Italian writer and screenwriter Cesare Zavattini (with the contribution of Fabio Carpi and Vasco Pratolini), the film's focus on the story of the two Jewish siblings offered a different approach to the subject of Nazi brutality and the Resistance. One reviewer defined this as an attempt to bypass the shortcomings of realism in favour of a new and more lyrical representation.⁴⁹

As these reviews show, the film was widely perceived as a Resistance film, albeit one that merged 'realism' in the representation of heroic Resistance and lyricism in the story of Lenka and Misha.⁵⁰ However, the Resistance was not the only theme. Reviews also acknowledged the Holocaust, and offered two different approaches to the relationship between the historical specificity of the event and the limits of representation. The left-wing film journal *Cinema nuovo* criticised what it perceived as an attempt to sweeten a 'cruel and desperate story of deportation and death' on moral grounds.⁵¹ This 'particularist' criticism, which emphasised the historical specificity of the Holocaust, was complemented by a contrasting 'universalist' criticism, articulated in the popular weekly magazine *Gente*. According to the reviewer, many films about Nazi persecution and the 'Jewish tragedy' had been produced since the end of the war, to the extent that in his view the subject had been exhausted by 1966.⁵² The reviewer then adopted

48 Filippo Sacchi, 'Geraldine Chaplin: un'immagine di poetica tenerezza', *Epoca*, 17/820 (12 June 1966): 110. Other comments defined the film as 'weak' when too ideological, or as too conventional in following the established narrative about the Second World War; see Paolo Pillitteri, 'Non dice al fratellino cieco che vanno al campo di sterminio', *Avanti!* (1 June 1966): 5, and Cincotti 1966: 95.

49 Domenico Meccoli, 'I film della settimana', *Epoca*, 17/808 (20 March 1966): 57.

50 Pillitteri 'Non dice al fratellino'; Sacchi, 'Geraldine Chaplin'; Cincotti, 1966; Tullio Kezich in *Settimana Incom illustrata* (24 April 1966), referenced in *Andremo in città* 1966: 1 verso.

51 'Andremo in città' 1967.

52 Domenico Campana, 'Un bimbo sogna il treno della felicità', *Gente*, 10/24 (15 June 1966): 74.

Jean Luc Godard's comment (most likely influenced by the impact of the Eichmann trial and Hannah Arendt's famous definition of the 'banality of evil') that the only possible film about the extermination would be one telling the story of a German secretary transcribing and filing the names of exterminated Jews,⁵³ in order to stress the modern and bureaucratic nature of the Nazi genocide. These two reviews are a sample of a recurring tension underlying Italian Holocaust narratives between 'particular' (i.e. historically specific) and 'universal' claims.

Diario di un italiano, La linea del fiume, and Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini

The particular context of the late 1960s and early 1970s set the conditions for a rather extreme form of 'universalism', exemplified by the ambiguity of (what came to be known as) the 'new discourse'. Before discussing the 'new discourse', however, three other films deserve attention. Each deals with the persecution of the Jews in Italy. In *Diario di un italiano*, the theme of Jewish persecution further coalesces with that of antifascism. The film, directed by Sergio Capogna and distributed in 1974 (although the first screening took place in 1973), was an adaptation of the short story *Vanda* by Vasco Pratolini,⁵⁴ already discussed in Chapter Two. Set in Florence in 1938 (the year of the racial laws), it tells the love story between Valerio, a working class young man whose father has died in a fascist prison, and Vanda, a Jew. Vanda keeps her identity secret from Valerio, for fear it could endanger him. One day she disappears and eventually commits suicide. It is only when trying to trace her that Valerio realises that his lover was a Jew and that her father was arrested for the same reason.

53 Campana, 'Bimbo'.

54 Pratolini 1993.

The film is centred on Valerio, and follows his journey from a complete lack of awareness of world-historical events to the development of an anti-fascist conscience after the discovery of Vanda's Jewishness following her suicide. As Marcus adroitly notes, the film aspires from the very title not only to represent a local story set in Florence, but to devise an exemplary 'chronicle of *italianità*.' In the jump from the local to the national, *Diario di un italiano* becomes a 'parable of political awakening with important implications for Italy as a whole.'⁵⁵

Through Valerio, then, the film aims to illustrate the shift of the whole Italian people from political obliviousness and passive acceptance of the regime to active rejection of Fascism. This thesis was very well established in public memory and in historiographical discourse.⁵⁶ What is problematic about it is not only that it is simplistic,⁵⁷ but also, as exemplified by the narrative structure of *Diario di un italiano*, that it presents the persecution of the Jews as a catalyst for the resurgence of Italy. Vanda's suicide – an act intended to protect Valerio from the fury of the racial laws – symbolises the sacrifice of Italian Jews for the redemption of the whole country. In this notion of Italy's redemption consumed in the body of its Jews is an appropriation of the Holocaust that went completely unnoticed by contemporaries. In fact, this was to be the fate of the entire film. *Diario di un italiano* was at odds with the climate of the mid-1970s, as it dealt neither with the supposedly ambiguous relationship between perpetrators and victims, nor with the continuities between Fascism or Nazism and contemporary society.

A similar indifference greeted *La linea del fiume* (Stream Line, Aldo Scavarda, 1976), an adventure film targeted at children and winner of the 1976 Golden Gryphon at the Giffoni Film Festival, specifically dedicated to this audience. It was the survival story of Giacomino, a Jewish child (the first of a series in Italian Holocaust films) who avoids deportation and is

⁵⁵ Marcus 2007: 49.

⁵⁶ De Felice 1993: 309; Chabod 1961: 96.

⁵⁷ Matard-Bonucci 2008: 265–92. For many youths like Valerio, disaffection with the regime came only with the military defeats of the Second World War; see Ben-Ghiat 2001a: 180–1.

eventually reunited with his father thanks to the help of ordinary citizens, priests, partisans, and Allied soldiers in Italy, France, and Britain.⁵⁸ As noted by Marcus, one important feature of the film, and perhaps one of the reasons why it was a box office flop, is that Giacomino is not an 'Italian every child', but persistently clings onto his Jewish identity.⁵⁹

Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini met with greater commercial success. The film, released in 1970, was the screen adaptation of Giorgio Bassani's successful novel published in 1962,⁶⁰ and was directed by the acclaimed maestro Vittorio De Sica. It won the Golden Bear at the 1971 Berlin Film Festival and the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language film the next year. These accolades ensured the film a broad reception. It is the story of the wealthy aristocratic Jewish Finzi-Contini family in Ferrara between 1938 and 1943. Expelled from all local institutions (such as the country club), the family opens the gate of its massive estate to visitors. There, their daughter Micòl plays tennis with her friends, among them Giorgio (the son of a lower middle-class Jewish family) and the non-Jewish radical Malnate. Giorgio is in love with Micòl, who rejects him and engages in an affair with Malnate. This personal rejection is the prelude to the end of the film. In 1943, in a roundup of Ferrara's Jews, the entire Finzi-Contini family and Giorgio's father are arrested (while Giorgio himself manages a narrow escape) and held in a large crowded room. At the end of their lives, all class differences are levelled; they all are going to die as Jews.

There are some differences between the film and the novel, in terms of the construction of both the plot and the characters. Giorgio Bassani, who had participated in the early stages of screenwriting, rejected the final

⁵⁸ Stories centred on Jewish children represent a whole subgenre of Holocaust films. As noted by Omer Bartov, children have the power to simultaneously shock and evoke empathy. See Bartov 2005: 112; Insdorf 2003: 77–92; Baron 2005: 171–200. Judith Doneson has criticised the representation of Jewish characters in Holocaust films as powerless female/child figures, often needy of the protection of a Christian figure in Doneson 1992. On the issue, see also Buruma 2004.

⁵⁹ Marcus 2007: 59–62.

⁶⁰ Bassani 1998a.

product.⁶¹ Part of the reception, influenced by this controversy, dwelt on the analysis of the differences between the two texts. Bassani's novel was heavily influenced by the author's own life as a Ferrarese Jew. Commentators pointed out that the novel offered a much deeper rooting in the historical context of the city, especially in the close relationship between the local Jewish community and Fascism, a thorny issue largely overlooked in the film.⁶² Thus, the novel mourned the loss of a community but also expressed resentment towards that same community for its acquiescence with the fascist regime up until the point it became too late to turn back.⁶³ The sense of elegy pervading the novel was absent in the film.⁶⁴ Without Bassani's mixture of memory and myth, personal involvement and critique towards the Jewish community of Ferrara, some reviewers saw *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* as little more than calligraphic and superficial.⁶⁵

However, the 'objective' perspective and tone of the film (in contrast with the subjectivity of the novel) gave rise to more varied interpretations. For example, Tullio Kezich saw in *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini*'s emotional detachment an indictment against the silent majority's incapacity to acknowledge and bear witness to those tragic events.⁶⁶ Lino Micciché, in turn, faulted the film for being a politically insufficient memory-exercise that limited its subject matter to the Jewish 'question',⁶⁷ thus implying that a Holocaust film must have a broader (universal) meaning transcending Jewish specificity. He criticised *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* for failing to

61 See G. M., 'Tutti i "fedeli" di Bassani per la pellicola di De Sica', *Corriere della Sera* (5 December 1970): 7.

62 Paulovich 1971.

63 See Cavallaro 1971: 73; Paulovich 1971.

64 Mino Argentieri, 'Bassani senza la sua ambiguità (ma con tanti effettacci)', *Rinascita*, 28/2 (8 January 1971): 24; Paulovich 1971.

65 Cavallaro 1971: 74; see also Pietro Bianchi, 'L'incontro del ricordo', *Il Giorno* (6 December 1970): 17.

66 Tullio Kezich, 'Il giardino dei Finzi Contini', *Panorama*, 9/246–7 (31 December 1970): 15.

67 Lino Micciché, 'Il giardino dei Finzi Contini', *Avanti!* (23 December 1970): 5.

highlight, 'behind' the Jewish theme, that of the political/historical critique of collaboration with Fascism.⁶⁸

As already stated, part of the reception engaged with the analysis of the differences between the two texts. However, none of the reviews noticed the two clear references to the concentration camps offered by the film, which are not present in the novel. The first of these appears in the introduction of a character with a number tattooed on his forearm who tells Giorgio about Dachau and its horrors. The second is present in the final shot of the film, where the deserted tennis court of the Finzi-Contini estate is visually depicted in a way that hints at the iconography of the camps.⁶⁹ However, the theme of the Holocaust was not entirely neglected by commentators, who interpreted it variedly. Furthermore, *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* was deplored by some for its weak and superficial contextualisation (especially compared with the literary text),⁷⁰ and eulogised by others for its accuracy.⁷¹

What went truly unnoticed was the film's emphasis on the role played by Italians in the Holocaust. Among the few references, while *il Resto del Carlino* sombrely acknowledged that deportations occurred 'even in a country of liberal traditions such as Italy',⁷² the magazine *Epoca* described the roundup scene by deflecting the blame onto the German occupiers.⁷³ The review published in *il Resto del Carlino* also mentioned the film's world premiere in Jerusalem, and the positive response it received in Israel, where

68 Braucourt 1971b: 65.

69 This aspect is pointed out by Insdorf 2003: 113.

70 Giovanni Grazzini, 'Il giardino dei Finzi Contini', *Corriere della Sera* (5 December 1970): 13; Giovanni Raboni, 'De Sica distrugge il romanzo di Bassani', *Avvenire* (6 December 1970): 6; Paulovich 1971; Argentieri, 'Bassani'; Garbarino 1971: 159.

71 Leo Pestelli, 'I "Finzi Contini" di De Sica fra la nostalgia e la tragedia', *La Stampa* (6 December 1970): 8; Filippo Sacchi, 'De Sica nel giardino della giovinezza perduta', *Epoca* 21/1056 (20 November 1970): 136.

72 Mario Salvatore, 'Il giardino dei Finzi Contini', *il Resto del Carlino* (4 December 1970): 8.

73 Sacchi, 'De Sica'.

Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini was received as primarily a Holocaust film.⁷⁴ This note becomes relevant if we consider that reviewers in Italy seldom identified the Holocaust as the film's main 'theme' or 'message'. For *Il Popolo* and *Il Giorno*, *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* was about the fascination with memory and impossible teenage love, set in a historical framework of which the Holocaust was merely a secondary element.⁷⁵ Reviewers saw the film as being about class divisions, as a microcosm whose rules also apply to society at large. Thus, reviews took note of different responses according to the characters' social station. The aristocratic Finzi-Continis are trapped in their heavy prestigious past,⁷⁶ and their garden becomes at the same time a haven and a ghetto.⁷⁷ Lower down the social ladder, there is a generational split in Giorgio's middle class family. His fascist father refuses to acknowledge the evidence of persecution, and clings to the delusion that 'Mussolini is not like Hitler', while Giorgio is outraged by persecution and does not expect rescue from the regime.⁷⁸ De Sica contributed to this line of interpretation by simplistically drawing a distinction between upper- and middle-class Jews supportive of Fascism before the persecution and passive after 1938, and working class Jews who instead contributed greatly to the Resistance.⁷⁹

Both *Diario di un italiano* and *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* were about fascist persecution of Italian Jews. Both films documented the impact of the racial laws and Jews being arrested by the Italian police. In both cases these precise references to Italian responsibility went entirely unnoticed.⁸⁰ While

74 Salvatore, 'Giardino'. Other references to the successful Jerusalem screening are in Grazzini, 'Giardino'.

75 Paolo Valmarana, 'Il giardino dei Finzi Contini', *Il Popolo* (23 December 1970): 7; Bianchi, 'Incontro'.

76 Pestelli, "'Finzi Contini'".

77 Grazzini, 'Giardino'.

78 Pestelli, "'Finzi Contini'".

79 Braucourt 1971a: 65. Of course, Jewish responses to the persecution and their participation to the Resistance is much more complex than this simplistic binary distinction; see Sarfatti 2000: 207–24, 271–83.

80 Lichtner 2008: 137–8.

Diario di un italiano was largely ignored, most reviews of *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* read it as a film about class, or even about impossible love.

The 'new discourse'

A further push towards universal readings of Nazism and Fascism was offered by the reception of the 'new discourse' films. The term 'new discourse' defines a number of films produced between the end of the 1960s and the mid-1970s, whose subjects were Fascism and Nazism. Instead of portraying heroic characters of the Resistance, these films tended to focus on perpetrators, or analyse the 'grey zone' in ways that were ambiguous (and sometimes equivocal). They offered a reappraisal of the past that did away with pre-existing narratives and interpretations of Fascism and the Resistance. In so doing, these films introduced concepts borrowed from psychoanalysis, and concerns about the politics of memory and representation. Taken as a whole, this body of films represented a dramatic shift from previous trends.⁸¹

This interest – even fascination – with Nazism and Fascism was an international phenomenon. According to Gavriel Rosenfeld, the so-called 'Hitler wave' started as a healthy reaction on the part of the interwar generation against the then-hegemonic portrayal of Hitler as a demonic figure. De-demonising and thus humanising Nazism was necessary in order to pass a better-informed judgment on it and on the previous generation. However, this humanisation soon opened the door to questionable forms of interest in the Third Reich.⁸² An ambiguous fascination with the world of the perpetrators, often expressed in sexualised terms, held sway for a number

81 See Forgacs 1999b.

82 Rosenfeld 2005: 218.

of years in the 1970s.⁸³ Cinema was at the forefront of this international process.

In Italy, the celebration of heroic Resistance of the early 1960s was replaced by concerns about the issues of guilt and coming to terms with the past, and the political, moral, and aesthetic continuity between Fascism and post-fascist society. In cinematographic terms these issues crystallised in numerous attempts to recode the representation of Fascism and Nazism, and in the rupture with binary moral divisions between Fascism and antifascism inherited from neorealism. The films in question drew upon psychoanalysis, Marxist and feminist critiques, and the sexualisation of politics. Moreover, they did not shy away from incorporating the overabundance of references to Fascism and Nazism in popular culture, nor of referring to the persistence of fascist and pre-fascist codes of representation in their aesthetics. In this way the films of the 'new discourse' reflected less a historical, than a historiographical interest. What is important in the context of this book is that in these films and in their reception there often emerged a tension between Nazism as a specific historical event on the one hand, and as a pseudo-historical aspect of modern societies, on the other.

As noted already, the subject of these films is not antifascism – and when it is, the perspective is often distorted, as in Bernardo Bertolucci's *La strategia del ragno* ('The Spider's Stratagem, 1970) where nothing is as it seems – apart from 'the enemy within'. Such approaches rejected interpretations of Fascism as a 'parenthesis'⁸⁴ and refused to corroborate established narratives based on clear-cut divisions between Nazism and the victimised national body, inherited from classics such as *Roma città aperta*. Instead, the films of the 'new discourse' related their representation of Nazism and Fascism to issues of class, gender politics, sexual perversion, and the eroticisation of Nazism in popular culture. David Forgacs has explained the fascination with the equation of Fascism and perversion in the 'new discourse' as the simultaneous lifting of restrictions on what could be represented on screen in terms of sexual content, and on historical memory in

relation to the war. Both were reactions to the strict hold on morality and memory of the 1950s. The result was what Forgacs defines a 'hot eruption of pseudo-history [...] from which it would be wise now to keep a cool, critical distance.'⁸⁵ What leaves many, especially scholars of the Holocaust, understandably uncomfortable is the fear of relativisation that emerges whenever categories like human nature, Western culture, or some metaphysical Faustian will – as in the case of *Mephisto* (István Szabó, 1981) – are employed to account for the destruction of the European Jews.⁸⁶

La caduta degli dei

The film that initiated the whole genre was *La caduta degli dei* by Luchino Visconti. Set in the early years of the Nazi regime, the film parallels the unfolding of the events on the public scene (the Reichstag fire, the Night of the Long Knives) with those involving the Krupp-like Essenbeck family, owners of the most important steelworks in Germany. In an orgy of sex, the drive for power, and murder, *La caduta degli dei* reconstructs the Nazification of the steelworks (as a metaphor for the wider German economy and society). Thus, the old president Joachim offers his SA nephew Konstantin the chair as a way of gaining favour with the new regime. But the old patriarch (who symbolises Junker capitalism) is killed and replaced by the ruthless Friederich, who is the lover of the patriarch's daughter-in-law Sophie. The couple is eventually forced to hand over control of the company to Joachim's nephew Martin, a feeble-minded child molester who is manipulated by his SS cousin Aschenbach.

83 Sontag 1980.

84 Croce 1998.

85 Forgacs 1999a: 233.

86 See as an example Bartov 1996: 127–8.

Against the immediate background of the Profumo case, the original plan was to shoot a version of Macbeth set in contemporary England.⁸⁷ The intention was to use the dissolution of a family to symbolise the unravelling of the whole social fabric.⁸⁸ The decision to set the film in Nazi Germany came only at a later stage and, as with *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa* ..., the historical context provided little more than a backdrop for the Essenbeck's drama staged by Visconti.⁸⁹

Although widely referenced in works on Holocaust films,⁹⁰ clearly the film was, and was seen to be, about something else, namely capitalism. Such interpretations were consistent with the heavy politicisation and ideological conflicts of 1969, and drew on a renewed interest in the links between Nazism and capitalism.⁹¹ Visconti tried to situate his work in this trend and defined *La caduta degli dei* as a Marxist film,⁹² a reading that few found convincing, even in the communist press.⁹³ The high-brow monthly *Il Dramma* criticised the film, claiming that it failed to acknowledge the essence of Nazism as a historical form of capitalism not qualitatively different from the present.⁹⁴ Visconti also claimed that *La caduta degli dei* was not a mimetic representation of Nazism, but a story in which every character becomes a symbol.⁹⁵ Accordingly, many reviewers saw the film as a game of mirrors between violence in the family and the violence of history.⁹⁶ In the director's own words, the family is 'a cell reflecting in microscopic terms

87 Bencivenni 1995: 72. The first draft of the script was entitled Macbeth 1967 and was published in Cecchi D'Amico and Visconti 1976.

88 Roncoroni 1969: 13.

89 G.F.B., 'Il crepuscolo degli dei', *Corriere della Sera* (3 October 1969): 13.

90 Avisar 1988: 152–62; Insdorf 2003: 125–36.

91 See for example the publication of Manchester 1969.

92 Roncoroni 1969: 29.

93 Mino Argentieri, 'L'altissimo melodramma di Luchino Visconti', *Rinascita*, 41 (17 October 1969): 17; Ugo Casiraghi, 'Gli dei s'incarnano nel nazismo', *l'Unità* (18 October 1969): 3.

94 Cavallaro 1969: 131–2; Baldelli 1973: 270.

95 Roncoroni 1969: 21.

96 Schmidt 1970: 683.

the general situation.⁹⁷ The fact that history was seen through the eyes of a family provided the rationale for the particular attention reserved in the film and in its reception to psychoanalysis.⁹⁸

Nevertheless, Visconti also tried to corroborate the film's historical accuracy by referencing William Shirer's *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* among his influences.⁹⁹ However, the authoritative film scholar Guido Aristarco rejected the film precisely on historical grounds. He criticised the representation of Aschenbach (symbolising Hitler) as a demonic power outside of history.¹⁰⁰ The film was criticised further for its inadequate representation of the relationship between Nazism and capitalism.¹⁰¹

Considering the energy deployed in investigating the relationship between Nazism and capitalism, it is no surprise that the allusion to the Holocaust made in the film went completely unnoticed. Martin twice rapes Lisa, a little Jewish girl, leading her to commit suicide by hanging herself in her poor suburban flat. Martin represents Nazified Germany. In *La caduta degli dei* every political crime is also prefigured by a sexual transgression. Lisa's rape and suicide, then, stands for the Holocaust. This connection went unnoticed for years,¹⁰² and reviews either ignored the episode or noted it simply as an element of sexual perversion.¹⁰³

97 Carla Stampa, 'Visconti morde', *Epoca*, 997 (2 November 1969): 141, and Visconti 1969.

98 Dorigo 1970: 11.

99 Shirer 1960. See Stirling 1979: 193.

100 See Guido Aristarco, 'L'ultimo Visconti tra Wagner e Mann', *La Stampa* (9 December 1969): 6; Aristarco 1969b; Aristarco 1997. On one occasion he explicitly criticised Visconti on historiographical grounds for being more influenced by Shirer than by Collotti; see Aristarco 1997: 136. For a portrait of Aristarco's role within the Italian cultural scene, see Brunetta 2001b: 386–9.

101 Torri 1973: 92–4; Pietro Bianchi, 'Apocalisse hitleriana senza un eroe positivo', *Il Giorno* (18 October 1969): 19; Zambetti 1970; see also Torri 1969–1970.

102 Bencivenni 1995: 76.

103 Achille Valdata 'Visconti contro gli "dei" nazisti falsi e corrotti', *Stampa Sera* (17–18 October 1969): 8; Roncoroni 1969: 22. Some saw it as a reference to Dostoevsky's *The Demons*; see Alberto Moravia, 'Macbeth con la finanziaria', *L'Espresso*, 15/43 (26 October 1969): 26; Roncoroni 1970: 146; Micciché 1996: 60; Angelo Solmi, 'Gloria

As already anticipated, *La caduta degli dei* and the films of the 'new discourse' rejected parenthetical interpretations of Nazism and Fascism. References to Wagner, Bruckner, Hegel and Thomas Mann were meant to stress the notion that Nazism's roots reached back into German high culture.¹⁰⁴ In this cornucopia of cultural references, *La caduta degli dei* plays with stereotypes about the representation of Nazism as decadent – often unconsciously. *Cineforum* stigmatised Visconti for pandering to the low taste of viewers and accused him of 'cultural paternalism.'¹⁰⁵ This critique was developed by *Cinema & Film*, which defined the film as reactionary on the basis that it was premised on aesthetic and ideological clichés.¹⁰⁶ The idea of Nazism presented in the film was one that adopted pre-Nazi aesthetic codes. At the same time, it responded to a theoretical approach to Nazism borrowed from the Frankfurt School, according to which Fascism was presented as a 'psychosexual manifestation of homosexual narcissism.'¹⁰⁷ Martin's drag performance and rape of his young cousin Thilde was the sexual counterpart of Joachim's murder, just as the homosexual orgy was followed by the slaughter of the SA, Lisa's suicide prefigured the Holocaust, and incest the total anarchy of unrestrained power, thus producing a coincidence between Nazism and sexual 'perversion.'¹⁰⁸

In this way and by unselfconsciously adopting deep-seated cultural codes, the film's eroticisation of Nazism signified the acknowledgement of a persistent threat expressing itself primarily in the form of transgressive sexuality.¹⁰⁹ The troubling consequences of this association of Nazism with sexual 'perversion' can be seen in the reception of this key aspect of

e miseria della famiglia Krupp', *Oggi Illustrato* (5 November 1969), in *Critica Reprint*, p. 20.

104 Schifano 1988: 333; Sineux 1970: 62.

105 Cavallaro 1970: 677. A not too different evaluation was expressed by Casiraghi, 'Dei'. See Schmidt 1970; Roboni 1970; Moscati 1970; Comuzio 1970; Zambetti 1970.

106 Their reading was that the film's mixture of naturalism and myth was kitsch; see Gelli 1970. A similar view is expressed in Schlappner *et al.* 1975: 109–16.

107 Hewitt 1996: 39.

108 Bencivenni 1995: 76; De Giusti 1985: 121.

109 On the persistent homosexualisation of Fascism in Italian culture, see Prono 2001.

the film. Martin's seduction of his young cousin was interpreted as confirmation of his moral and physical deviancy, as already anticipated by his drag performance.¹¹⁰ Another reviewer suggested that in Martin the family's 'signs of moral decadence are best put in evidence and are concrete: they go from disguising himself as a woman [...] to the morbidly wrong inclination for little girls.'¹¹¹ The SA were described in *Corriere della Sera* as a 'gang of invertes (*invertiti*)',¹¹² and their orgy prior their mass slaughter as 'hair-raising'.¹¹³ *La Stampa* defined it a 'pederastic festival',¹¹⁴ an evaluation shared with the far-right weekly *Il Borghese*,¹¹⁵ and with the weekly tabloid *Oggi Illustrato*, which described it as 'disgusting homosexual chaos'.¹¹⁶ The orgy scene epitomised the film's identification of sexual 'perversion' and Nazism.¹¹⁷ Thus, the relation blatantly established in *La caduta degli dei* between non-heterosexuality and Nazi violence was used by the press to reassure Italian viewers, separating them from the film's historical subject.

Il portiere di notte

If *La caduta degli dei* inaugurated a series of films that purportedly and dangerously played with history and clichés, mixing grandiose statements about human nature and erotic titillation, Liliana Cavani's *Il portiere di*

110 Roncoroni 1970: 148.

111 Valdata, 'Visconti'.

112 Leonardo Vergani, 'Visconti e "La caduta degli dei"', *Corriere della Sera* (18 October 1969): 13.

113 'Visconti, livido affresco', *Corriere della Sera* (18 October 1969): 13.

114 Leo Pestelli, 'Un "Trionfo della morte"', *La Stampa* (18 October 1969): 3.

115 'A solemn elegiac festival of pederasty', see Fabrizio Sarazani, 'Luchino e i suoi "compagni"', *Il Borghese*, 44 (26 October 1969): 498.

116 Solmi, 'Gloria'.

117 Campari 1997: 267.

notte was the most successful, controversial, and complex of these films. The film is set in 1957. Max, a former SS officer, works as night porter in a luxury hotel in Vienna. The building harbours other Nazi veterans: the lawyer Klaus, the Countess Stein, and the dancer Bert. Together, they have formed a 'therapy group' of sorts that stages feigned trials, with the aim of accumulating and destroying evidence of their heinous past while relieving their conscience of any guilt. On the eve of his case's examination, Max is distraught following the unexpected appearance at the hotel of the opera conductor Atherton and his wife, Lucia. During the war the fifteen year old Lucia was a victim of Max's sadistic tastes but also his lover in the concentration camp. The mutual recognition stirs up their troubled memories. Lucia fails to reveal Max's identity to her husband. At the same time Max refuses to acknowledge Lucia's presence to his colleagues, thus concealing an important piece of evidence for the 'trial'. When Lucia's husband leaves town for the next date on his concert tour, she resumes her sadomasochistic affair with Max. Hunted by Max's comrades, Lucia moves to his flat. Using their extended web of complicities, Max's comrades lay siege to his apartment, cutting it off from access to food, electricity, and water. Inside, Max and Lucia recreate a lager-like situation and act out their sexual fantasies until they are strained and weakened. With his last remaining energies Max dons his SS uniform and dresses Lucia in the party dress she used in the camp. Thus attired, they leave the building and go for a walk in a mauvish Viennese dawn, only to be killed by Max's former comrades.

The film provoked heated debates in Italy even before its release. However, what troubled consciences in the early days of the Italian reception was not the ambiguous relationship between a former Nazi and a survivor but the film's treatment of sex, and the authorities' overreaction. The film was banned on the grounds that 'it is twice pernicious, because made by a woman and because it shows a despicable scene where the female performer takes the initiative in the sexual relationship.'¹¹⁸ The ban was lifted and the film went on general release, only to be seized by a magistrate

118 Chiara Beria, 'Sei donna? Sotto', *Panorama* (2 May 1974): 98.

a few days later. The director was put on trial charged with 'offence to the common sense of modesty (*pudore*)'.¹¹⁹

These events occurred at a delicate moment in Italian politics. An important popular referendum on divorce was only weeks away. Moreover, frequent neo-fascist bombing attacks and the increasing violence of groups such as the Red Brigades fuelled concerns about a possible authoritarian outcome of the crisis modelled on the Chilean example.¹²⁰ Some saw in the censorship of *Il portiere di notte* a prelude to wider restrictions on civil liberties, and the issue was debated in Parliament.¹²¹ The film became a test case for freedom of speech, gaining unprecedented support among intellectuals, while at the same time acquiring a popular aura of controversy that became part and parcel of its social identity.¹²² For all these reasons, *Il portiere di notte* was widely debated in Italy. But it also engendered a number of discussions abroad, especially among feminist scholars, which for reasons of space cannot be discussed in detail here.¹²³ I will focus instead on the reception of the film's representation of Nazism and representation of the relationship between victim and perpetrator.

As with *La caduta degli dei*, the debate engendered by *Il portiere di notte* highlighted the overlap of history and psychoanalysis in 'new discourse' cinema, as well as presenting Nazism as a historical event and as a metaphor. The film's director contributed to this mixture commenting that Fascism was a plague affecting Europe's deepest recesses, adding that 'reducing' Nazism to history was tantamount to 'collaboration'.¹²⁴ In Cavani's view, history needed psychoanalysis to expose Nazism's supposed core.

119 "Il portiere di notte" messo sotto sequestro, *l'Unità* (18 April 1974): 9.

120 L.A., 'Un piano preordinato?', *Corriere della Sera* (19 April 1974): 13.

121 See *La Voce Repubblicana*, referenced in 'L'ampia mobilitazione di lavoratori e cineasti', *l'Unità* (20 April 1974): 9; 'Per "Il portiere di notte" interrogazione sulla censura', *La Stampa* (6 April 1974): 9.

122 Luigi Cavicchioli, 'Il nazi-portiere che ha dato scandalo', *Domenica del Corriere*, 76/20 (19 May 1974): 68–71.

123 See Marrone 1990: 146; De Lauretis 1976–1977; Silverman 1980; Silverman 1988: 218–25; Ravetto 2001: 150–85; Pietropaolo 1989.

124 Cavani 1974: viii.

Accordingly, part of the Italian critical response focused less on Nazism than on the roots of potential psychological 'nazism'.¹²⁵ Not surprisingly *Il portiere di notte* met with disagreement from Marxist critics, who saw it as equivocal because it downplayed the structural elements of Nazism (i.e. class oppression) focusing on its 'superstructural' side instead.¹²⁶ They were irritated by the film's use of Nazism as a metaphor. However, it was not the film's misappropriation of Nazi violence that they saw as distressing, but the fact that Nazism and Fascism were de-historicised and reduced to existential categories.

A key role in terms of shaping the reception of the film in Italy was played by the director herself. As is often the case for the directors of Holocaust feature films, Liliana Cavani felt it appropriate to back-up the story of her film with references to real-life survivors' postwar experiences. She often mentioned the stories of two Italian female survivors. According to Cavani, the first used to return to Dachau every summer, while the second secluded herself from the outside world after realising that the experience in Auschwitz had brought out the darkest side of her.¹²⁷ Cavani adopted these two stories to legitimise her bleak view of the victim-perpetrator relationship as based on the sadism-punishment nexus. When asked to explain the meaning of her film, Cavani replied that we all are victims or assassins and willingly accept these roles, and that the war is a catalyst for our impulses. Human nature is ambiguous, Cavani mused, and if we want to avoid the mistakes of the past, we must start from the 'small nazism that is within each one of us'.¹²⁸

Cavani's views, along with the film itself, were later criticised by Primo Levi, who did not join in the discussion of the film upon its release. He dismissed Cavani's interpretation of the first survivor's frequent trips to

125 See Bosisio 1978.

126 See Giacci 1975: 306–10.

127 Cavani 1974: vii–viii; L. Bo., 'La Cavani: "il nazismo non è morto del tutto"', *Corriere della Sera* (2 April 1974): 13; Sergio Surchi, 'I nazisti si confessano', *La Nazione* (6 March 1973): 9; Luigi Saitta, 'Una vicenda di criminali di guerra', *L'Osservatore Romano* (18 July 1973): 5.

128 Cavani 1974: ix–x.

Dachau. It was her job as a teacher, Levi pointed out, that led her to take students to Dachau to show them the camp.¹²⁹ He also rejected the director's claim that there is a degree of Nazism in everyone and argued that confusing the perpetrators with their victims was a sign of moral disorder.¹³⁰ However, Levi did not shrink from ambiguity. While reproaching Cavani, he was articulating his landmark concept of grey zone. He wrote that it is 'naïve, absurd and historically false to believe that an infernal system such as National Socialism sanctifies its victims: on the contrary, it degrades them, it makes them similar to itself'.¹³¹ What disturbed him in the film was its misappropriation and distortion of the Holocaust for present purposes. Accordingly, he defined *Il portiere di notte* a 'beautiful and false film [...] a precious service rendered (intentionally or not) to the deniers of truth'.¹³² These same critiques were also predominant in the early Anglo-American reception of the film. On its American release, *Il portiere di notte* was torn apart by critics,¹³³ and Henry Giroux in *Cineaste* defined it a 'thinly disguised fascist propaganda film that glorifies sadism'.¹³⁴

Besides these scathing criticisms, it is clear that Cavani offered a relativising view of Nazism, perceived more urgently as a present political threat and an inbuilt part of human nature than as a past horror.¹³⁵ *Il portiere di notte's* treatment of Nazism as an historical event was less controversial

129 Pasquale De Filippo, 'Primo Levi, il testimone di quelli che non tornarono', *Gazzetta del mezzogiorno* (10 December 1977), quoted in Marrone 2000: 94.

130 Levi 1997h: 1027. On many occasions Levi referred in the same terms to *Il portiere di notte*; see for instance Levi 1997c; Levi 1997d; Levi 1997e; Levi 1997f; 'Note ai testi' 1997b: 1563.

131 Levi 1997h: 1020.

132 Levi 1997h: 1027.

133 Vincent Canby, "'The Night Porter' is Romantic Pornography", *New York Times* (13 October 1974): 1, 19; Pauline Kael, 'The Current Cinema: Stuck in the Fun', *The New Yorker* (7 October 1974): 151–6; Kauffmann 1974; Houston and Kinder 1975.

134 Giroux 1975: 31. The film was also criticised by McCormick 1975: 31–4.

135 See Tiso 1975: 15–17. Commenting on the massacre in Brescia of 8 people after the explosion of a time-bomb positioned by a neo-fascist group, Charlotte Rampling (Lucia in *Il portiere*) affirmed 'Brescia too is Nazism', see Costanzo Costantini, 'La ragazza di notte', *Il Messaggero* (2 June 1974): 3.

in Italy than elsewhere. The film's rejection of historical singularity and emphasis on modern power was not widely questioned, but often supported, as in the roundtable discussion of the film hosted by the weekly magazine *Panorama*. There, a number of intellectuals further relativised the meaning of the film, highlighting the alleged similarities between Nazism and contemporary society, and reading the film as a commentary on the gender conflict of which the camp was simply a symbol.¹³⁶

Some reviewers read Nazism as the embodiment of bourgeois morality. The film critic Ciriaco Tiso emphasised the tension he saw in the film between Max and Lucia on the one hand, who were obscene because they exceeded the moral boundaries of society, and Max's former comrades on the other. The latter were true-believers, unrepentant Nazis, but their morality allowed them to retain their positions as respectable members of society. He noted that Max and Lucia's behaviour is amoral, but that the wardens of morality are real Nazis. In this sense, then, *Il portiere di notte* was a critique of all previous representations of Nazism as sexual perversion, from *Roma città aperta* to *La caduta degli dei*.¹³⁷

Reviewers, however, thought differently. With a broad consensus, numerous contemporary readings of the film saw it as a sign of decadence.¹³⁸

136 Emilia Granzotto and Giuliano Gallo, 'Sedotti dal nero?', *Panorama* (9 October 1975): 116–24 (roundtable with Liliana Cavani, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Tullio Kezich, Federico Navarro, Luigi De Marchi, and Goffredo Parise). The heavy-handed comparison between gender relations and the camps was also supported by De Lauretis 1976–1977: 35–6. The discussion of the film in such terms helps to explain the abundance of psychoanalytic interpretations, see Stefano Reggiani, 'Registe d'assalto', *La Stampa* (9 April 1974): 7; Piscitelli 1974: 54; Giuliani 1980: 106. The Freudian School in Paris dedicated two seminars to the relationship between the representation of historical events and the present in *Il portiere*; see Giulia Massari in *Il Mondo* (30 May 1974), referenced in Tallarigo and Gasparini 1990: 78. For Jung, see Costanzo Costantini, 'La censurata', *Il Messaggero* (27 April 1974): 3.

137 Tiso 1975: 104. See also Tiso 1974: 331–2; See also Marrone 2000: 108, Ravetto 2001: 150.

138 Alberto Moravia, 'C'è un nazista a pianterreno', *L'Espresso* (21 April 1974): 88. The Communist *Rinascita* claimed that 'there is a perfect compatibility between professed ideology and individuals' conduct. Aestheticism, decadence, myth of the pure race,

With different degrees of hostility, all blamed the film's ambiguity and lack of a moral figure with which viewers could easily identify, or recognise as evil.¹³⁹ To sum up, as with other films of the 'new discourse', *Il portiere di notte* generated criticism for its equivocal representation of Nazism and the camps (the camp is visualised in the film in two long flashback sequences),¹⁴⁰ and for its approach to the theme of historical and moral responsibility.

One aspect that failed to stimulate discussion was the identity of Lucia as a victim. Since *Il portiere di notte* has obtained a steady (if negative) place in the international literature on Holocaust films,¹⁴¹ it is worth looking at the reception of this specific aspect. Two moments in the film define Lucia's status as a prisoner. In the first, a flashback set in the camp, we see newly arrived prisoners queuing. They are still wearing their civilian clothes, and viewers can see that while many of them don the yellow star, Lucia does not. The second hint is given when Max meets an ex prisoner of the camps, who refers to Lucia as 'the daughter of a socialist'.¹⁴² These are the only two

homosexuality [sic], religion of the Superman, late-Romanticism, release of aggressive instincts: the director does not miss any Nazi cultural way of thinking in representing Max and the characters around him', see Mino Argentieri, 'Liliana Cavani tra magia e storia', *Rinascita*, 17 (26 April 1974): 23. The weekly *Famiglia Cristiana* defined the film as an apologia for evil, see c.c., *Famiglia cristiana* (5 May 1974) quoted in Tallarigo and Gasparini 1990: 79. In the right-wing daily newspaper *Il Giornale d'Italia* *Il portiere* is defined as a decadent story seen from a decadent perspective, see Claudio Quarantotto, 'Il portiere di notte', *Il Giornale d'Italia* (16–17 April 1974): 14. See also Claudio Quarantotto in *Il Borghese* (28 April 1974), referenced in Tallarigo and Gasparini 1990: 49.

139 Oreste del Buono, 'Il portiere apre la porta al nazismo?', *L'Europeo* (9 May 1974): 145. Del Buono's argument was that viewers were fascinated by the film, and Cavani was fascinated by Nazism, thus echoing Susan Sontag's critique of the film in Sontag 1980: 99. See also Giacci 1975: 305. Others, more recently, have criticised the bond between victims and perpetrators suggested in the film; see Poggialini 1989: 15; Apel 2002: 161–2.

140 Cappabianca 1974; Bruno 1974.

141 Insdorf 2003: 130–2; Friedman 1984; Bartov 1996: 127–8; Apel 2002: 160–2; Bartov 2005: 69–70; Rosenfeld 2005: 19.

142 Cavani 1974: 37.

references. However, in various reviews, Lucia was presented as a Jew,¹⁴³ an Austrian Jew,¹⁴⁴ a German Jew,¹⁴⁵ the Jewish daughter of a Socialist MP,¹⁴⁶ a non-Aryan,¹⁴⁷ and an Israelite victim.¹⁴⁸ Some went further and suggested that Max's comrades wanted to eliminate Lucia not just because she was a witness, but also in order to avoid race defilement.¹⁴⁹ Liliana Cavani's comment on the issue reiterated the recurring pattern of Italian Holocaust debates that a focus on the victims as Jews would somehow deprive the representation of its 'universal meaning.'¹⁵⁰ But this 'universalisation' of the victim is not the only conclusion that can be drawn. The inaccuracy with which Lucia's status as a Jewish victim was described can be seen as a sign that by 1974, in Italy as in other countries, a film partially set in a concentration camp was assumed to be a film about a Jewish victim. In other words, a significant number of people identified Jews as the main victims of Nazism.

What remains to be asked now is whether this misdirected inference had an impact on how *Il portiere di notte* was evaluated. In the Anglo-American world it probably did.¹⁵¹ In an article published in the *Journal of Contemporary History* ten years after the release of the film,

143 Rodolfo Doni, 'Portiere di notte', *La Nazione* (18 May 1974): 3; Cavicchioli, 'Nazi-portiere': 70; McCormick 1975: 34; Gemini 1975: 87; Giuliani 1980: 106; Grazzini 1990: 142; R. Rasp, *Der Spiegel*, 8 (1975), pp. 121–6 referenced in Friedman 1984: 526 n 19.

144 Leo Pestelli, 'Gli "incubi" del nazismo', *La Stampa* (1 June 1974): 9; Moravia, 'C'è un nazista': 87.

145 Domenico Meccoli, 'Nell'albergo di Dirk Bogarde è passato Dostoevski', *Epoca*, 25/1230 (28 April 1974): 139.

146 Argentieri, 'Liliana Cavani': 23.

147 Ravetto 2001: 150.

148 Argentieri 1990: 132.

149 Giroux 1975: 31.

150 See Marrone 2000: 95–7. In his autobiography, Dirk Bogarde (Max in the film) wrote that Cavani originally thought of Lucia as a Jew; see Bogarde 1983: 141–2. A trace of this change can perhaps be detected in the published script, where Max checks the name of the guest she has just recognised, and mentally repeats 'Lucia Arnheim Atherton', see Cavani 1974: 14.

151 This is also the opinion expressed in Marrone 1990: 146.

R.M. Friedman acknowledged Lucia's non-Jewish origins. However, he took to task the film, its director, and the reviewers for reproducing what he perceived to be anti-Semitic stereotypes and prejudices. The fact that so many critics saw a Jew in the 'sensual and submissive' Lucia was in his view proof of how deep-seated was the Western cliché of the 'beautiful Jewess.' For Friedman, however, the film was also to blame for the choice of setting this eroticised stereotype of the Jew in a concentration camp location.¹⁵²

A quite different reading came from the Austrian Jewish publication *Die Gemeinde*. During the press conference in Vienna, Cavani noted that in 1957 the city was crawling with former SS. She also added that she made Lucia a Gentile because five million non-Jews died in the camps, too. While it is quite clear why the Jewish journal eulogised the first statement, the second needs to be qualified. Cavani's emphasis on the millions of 'Aryans' who died in the camps likely struck a deeper chord in the Austrians' hearts than a remark on the six million Jews would have done.¹⁵³ This episode shows once again how diverse receptions can be in different socio-cultural contexts. What was read by some in the US as a barely disguised stereotyped (if not outright anti-Semitic) representation, was hailed as a bold and true statement by an official Jewish publication in a country that, in 1975, had not yet faced its own past, while in Italy the entire issue was simply deemed unworthy of discussion.

152 See Friedman 1984: 518–19; M.C. 1974: 74.

153 Rita Koch, *Die Gemeinde* (5 March 1975), reproduced in Tallarigo and Gasparini 1990: 75–6. For a brief overview of postwar Austrian memory of the Nazi period, see Knight 2000.

Pasqualino Settebellezze

The last film of the ‘new discourse’ is *Pasqualino Settebellezze*. The film has established itself in the canon of Holocaust filmic texts as a ‘controversial study of survival that tests an audience’s threshold of laughter and horror.’¹⁵⁴ It tells the story of Pasqualino, a Neapolitan small-time criminal who kills the pimp of one of his seven sisters in order to preserve the honour of the family in the local crime underworld. While serving his sentence, he is offered the opportunity to leave if he joins the army in the campaign on the Russian front in support of Operation Barbarossa. Pasqualino grabs the opportunity. After the armistice between Italy and the Allies, Pasqualino is taken prisoner and sent to a concentration camp along with a comrade. There, he is ready to go to any lengths in order to survive. This includes not only seducing the female SS commandant of the camp, but also shooting his friend at point-blank range, when ordered to do so by the Nazi guards. After the war, Pasqualino returns home alive, but emptied and apathetic. The price for his physical survival is the loss of internal life and dignity.

The film had a strong impact on American audiences upon release. Its controversial subject and style generated both enthusiasm and outrage,¹⁵⁵ and engendered a debate that contributed greatly to prepare the ground for more recent discussion of the use of comedy in Holocaust films. Bruno Bettelheim, in his review for *The New Yorker*, was incensed by what he saw as a falsification and degradation of the survivors’ experience, and identified in *Pasqualino Settebellezze* a symptom of contemporary societies’ inability to fully connect with those traumatic events. He found the film’s claim that physical preservation alone could sustain the will to survive to be in abject contrast with his own experience as a prisoner in Buchenwald.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Insdorf 2003: 71.

¹⁵⁵ See Kael 1980: 139.

¹⁵⁶ Bruno Bettelheim, ‘Surviving’, *The New Yorker* (2 August 1976): 31–52, reprinted in Bettelheim 1979: 84–104.

Bettelheim’s critique of *Pasqualino Settebellezze* was rejected by Terrence Des Pres, according to whom the laughter caused by the film was not an escapist one, but on the contrary served the purpose of enhancing viewers’ awareness of the deformity of life in the camps.¹⁵⁷ For Des Pres, carnivalesque laughter represents a revolt against any order that claims to be fixed, and is therefore in itself antifascist. Moreover, Holocaust comedy was not only a life-reclaiming response to terror no less effective than tragedy and realism, it also represented an antidote against the desensitisation of viewers.¹⁵⁸ Some of these themes can also be found in the Italian reception of the film, although with different qualifications.

Released in December 1975, *Pasqualino Settebellezze* was interpreted by the vast majority of reviewers as a parable of abjection through which a victim turns into a monster in order to survive. There was less agreement over where the eventual responsibility for this state of affairs lay. For some the war itself was to blame,¹⁵⁹ while for the majority of reviewers it was ultimately Pasqualino’s own fault.¹⁶⁰ The *Corriere della Sera* reviewer Giovanni Grazzini read the film as a demonstration that ‘only a monster [...] can defend with murder and total abjection the duty to preserve the species. A real man [...] should prefer suicide, or offer himself in Holocaust [sic], rather than becoming an instrument of vileness.’¹⁶¹

Here is the first strong political element of the Italian reception of the film. Many reviewers set Pasqualino’s conduct against that of a fellow prisoner (a Spanish anarchist) who chooses to drown himself in a pool of

¹⁵⁷ Des Pres 1976a. Other sources for the reconstruction of this debate are Des Pres 1976b; Bettelheim 1979; and Des Pres 1979.

¹⁵⁸ See on this Des Pres 1988.

¹⁵⁹ Dario Zanelli, ‘Il capolavoro di Tarkovski e l’ultima Lina Wertmüller’, *il Resto del Carlino* (21 December 1975): 8.

¹⁶⁰ Leo Pestelli, “Pasqualino Settebellezze” fra opera buffa e tragedia, *La Stampa* (27 December 1975): 8; Ugo Casiraghi, ‘Pasqualino Settebellezze’, *l’Unità* (24 December 1975): 12; Morando Morandini, ‘Il guappo nel “lager”’, *Il Giorno* (23 December 1975): 17; Morandini 1976: 241.

¹⁶¹ Giovanni Grazzini, ‘Pasqualino “tira a campà”’, *Corriere della Sera* (23 December 1975): 16.

excrement rather than collaborate with his persecutors.¹⁶² As this less than subtle image made clear, the anarchist represented a politically-aware and extreme form of resistance against Nazism, while Pasqualino embodied cynical and amoral individualism. Thus, the film was eulogised and criticised in political terms on two counts: one pointed at the discrete historical event, and the other cast it in the present, therefore reproducing the recurring dialectic in Italian Holocaust discussions between historical specificity and universalism pointing towards the present. *Pasqualino Settebellezze* was defined by the socialist *Avanti!* as a story that emphasised the need to rebel and maintain dignity against Nazi oppression. But it criticised the film for its coarseness, claiming it resulted in a lack of respect for the 'victims of Fascism [and for antifascism in general.]'¹⁶³ A similar critique was raised by *Avvenire*, which perceived the farcical representation of the camps as inappropriate.¹⁶⁴

The universalisation of the film's 'meaning' was put forward by reviewers who saw it as a statement against the deeply ingrained Italian culture of *qualunquismo*, of not taking sides. *Pasqualino Settebellezze* was a film against indifference and *qualunquismo*,¹⁶⁵ or even the lack of ideals of consumerist societies.¹⁶⁶ But it was also criticised for being itself a *qualunquista* cheap comedy.¹⁶⁷

Once again we see that in Italy Holocaust-related films were often read in quite different terms from other cultural contexts. Contemporary political and cultural concerns deeply influenced their reception. *Pasqualino Settebellezze* offered a controversial insight into the ambiguities of clear-

¹⁶² Grazzini, 'Pasqualino'; Morandini, 'Guappo'; Morandini 1976: 242.

¹⁶³ R. F., 'Con l'occhio al botteghino', *Avanti!* (23 December 1975): 5.

¹⁶⁴ Sandro Rezoagli, 'Un mostro in chiave farsesca', *Avvenire* (24 December 1975): 7.

¹⁶⁵ Savio 1976; Tullio Kezich, 'Pasqualino Settebellezze', *Panorama*, 14/508 (14 January 1976): 17; Grossini 1976.

¹⁶⁶ Riva 1976: 72.

¹⁶⁷ Savio 1976; Rezoagli, 'Mostro'; R. F., 'Con l'occhio'; Mino Argentieri, 'Il film di Steno: Poveri ma galli', *Rinascita*, 33/2 (9 January 1976): 26. The Communist newspaper *l'Unità* praised the film's mockery of Nazi and Fascist regimes; see Casiraghi, 'Pasqualino Settebellezze'.

cut moral distinctions between perpetrators and victims (or in the Italian context, fascists and antifascists). This may also help to account for the less than enthusiastic reception it garnered in the left-wing press.

The film's grotesque comedy style was also criticised. The conservative *Il Giornale d'Italia* stated that the mixture of tragic and grotesque was not a suitable means of representing the camps.¹⁶⁸ The moral consequence of this aesthetic choice was made explicit by *Avanti!*: between the two characters of Pasqualino and the Nazi commander of the camp, she is the one represented with the greater humanity and dignity.¹⁶⁹ These two reviews (whose criticism is comparable to Bettelheim's) point towards a debate on the limits of representation that was marginal in Italy until the late 1990s. It was marginal because the Holocaust itself was far from being perceived as a discrete and specific event. Instead, it represented a sort of repertoire to be drawn upon by film-makers, reviewers and commentators in order to talk about other issues. The striking equation of the camps with Naples, explicit in the film and picked up on by reviewers,¹⁷⁰ or their use as a mere metaphor for power in modern society are fitting examples of this extreme relativisation.¹⁷¹

Even more remarkable is the repression in *Pasqualino Settebellezze* of the subject of Italian Prisoners of War. As Ruth Ben-Ghiat has pointed out, the fate of the six hundred thousand military prisoners of war was one of the most neglected themes in modern Italian history.¹⁷² Just as the film presents Pasqualino as an unwilling fighter (he joins the army as a way to leave prison), none of the reviews touched upon the basic question of what Italian troops were doing in Russia, what side they were on, and what that implied in terms of historical and collective responsibility. Much in line

¹⁶⁸ Renato Ghiotto, 'Pasqualino Settebellezze', *Il Giornale d'Italia* (24–25 December 1975): 12.

¹⁶⁹ R. F., 'Con l'occhio'.

¹⁷⁰ Grazzini, 'Pasqualino'; Savio 1976.

¹⁷¹ Alberto Moravia, 'Pulcinella entra nel lager', *L'Espresso*, 22/5 (1 February 1976): 64.

¹⁷² Ben-Ghiat 2001b.

with the entire body of films on the Second World War produced in Italy, Pasqualino and his comrade were represented and discussed as victims.

Pasqualino Settebellezze (along with the other ‘new discourse’ films) signalled a discontinuity in the narrative about the war. The Italian was no longer represented as a hero who endured torture and death as in *Roma città aperta*, but as an ambiguous survivor. This shift in representation highlights the crisis of the Resistance narrative described at the outset of this chapter, and the widespread search for signs of continuity between past and present society. However, Pasqualino was not a resister, but a soldier of the Italian fascist army. While the film’s focus on an ambiguous anti-hero was a sign of narrative discontinuity, the distinction between the criminal policies of the regime on the one hand, and the victimised Italians on the other was not questioned. The film opens with black and white footage of Mussolini and Hitler celebrating their alliance. It then introduces the character of the unwilling and fleeing Italian soldier. This continuity in the representation of the war anti-hero in Italian cinema (including *Pasqualino Settebellezze*) was stressed in the non-Italian journal *Sight and Sound*, as follows: ‘The only hero we have seen in Italian films has been this sort of man, this survivor. Simply to survive is the only kind of honour that any Italian writer and film-maker has proposed in the postwar era.’¹⁷³ *Pasqualino Settebellezze* is one of the forms assumed by Italian culture when not confronting the country’s historical responsibility.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Non-Event: The Broadcast of *Holocaust*

This chapter focuses on the analysis of the TV miniseries *Holocaust*, broadcast on Rete 1 (formerly Programma Nazionale) between 20 May and 19 June 1979. While the films discussed above were at least co-produced by Italian companies and directed by Italian filmmakers, the subject of this chapter is an entirely American production. As stated in the introduction, the relevance of the cultural products examined in this study pertains less to the homogeneity of the medium (films), or the context of their production (Italy), than to the way their press reception highlights important themes in the process of the domestication of the Holocaust in Italy. In this sense, the wealth of responses generated by *Holocaust* worldwide offers a valuable case study for understanding the specifics of the Italian case. In this chapter I argue that the heavy politicisation of the Italian context and the dominant narrative about the Second World War positing Italy as an innocent and victimised country resulted in a very selective process of acknowledgement of the country’s involvement in the Holocaust. Moreover, the reception of *Holocaust* in Italy presented a rather peculiar version of the debate on the so-called ‘trivialisation of the Holocaust.’ This was mainly due to the fact that the Holocaust was perceived more as a by-product of general Nazi brutality than as a specifically Jewish tragedy. Linked to this was the fact that the lack of a strong cultural presence of organised Jewry in Italy allowed for the most disparate forms of de-historicisation and universalisation of the Holocaust to circulate uncontested.

NBC’s miniseries *Holocaust: The Story of the Family Weiss* is undoubtedly one of the most popular and talked about representations of the Holocaust ever screened. First aired in the United States in April 1978 and

173 Westerbeck 1976: 136.

watched by an estimated 120 million viewers,¹ the drama was then sold to most other Western countries, where it achieved similar success. However, its importance lies not only in its worldwide success, which made it the first truly global representation of the Holocaust as a specifically Jewish event. *Holocaust* is also important for the number of debates engendered by its broadcast in different national contexts.² For all these reasons, *Holocaust* is often seen as a watershed not just in terms of the representation of the Holocaust, but also in relation to the role popular cultural products have come to play in shaping Holocaust memory culture.³ Judith Doneson has argued that the miniseries had moral and political repercussions on an international scale unmatched by any previous representation of the catastrophe. But unlike the American reception, which could be defined as a moral response, the European reaction was characterised by political tensions. In Europe, she observes, 'an American television show created an uproar and forced Europeans to confront their [...] participation in the destruction of European Jewry.'⁴

While there is much truth in Doneson's words with regard to, for example, what was then West Germany, her claim regarding the impact of *Holocaust* is less convincing as regards the Italian case. Here, its broadcast did not stand out as a watershed in the process of memorialisation of the Holocaust, and the public debate it engendered did not focus on questions of the country's complicity. Indeed, the significance of the Italian reception of *Holocaust* lies less in the themes that were actually discussed than in the sensitive subjects carefully omitted from the debate. Not unlike the French reception,⁵ the Italian debate surrounding the broadcast missed the opportunity to discuss the country's role in the Holocaust. History-writing had its share of responsibility. The substantial lack of historical research on these themes in those years, especially in the communist-ori-

1 Shandler 1999: 155.

2 The important role played by the miniseries in the construction of a Western public memory of the Holocaust is also acknowledged by Judt 2005: 811.

3 Shandler 1997: 153; Rosenfeld 1983.

4 Doneson 2002: 150.

5 See on this Wolf 2004: 71–2.

ented historiography,⁶ was interrupted only in 1978 and 1979, with articles published in Socialist and Liberal journals,⁷ and Giuseppe Mayda's book on the persecution of Jews under the Italian Social Republic.⁸ However, these researches failed to engender a broader public debate. The lack of a proper Italian historiography of the Holocaust until the late 1980s-early 1990s lamented by Mario Toscano concurred in fuelling the widespread reluctance to acknowledge the reality of the Holocaust as an event that involved Italy in a subject-position other than that of an innocent victim.⁹ The press debate around *Holocaust* is to a considerable extent part of this process. Largely in keeping with established narratives on the Second World War, the press debates surrounding the broadcast failed to confront Italy's role in the Holocaust – highlighting instead numerous episodes of rescue. Commentators stressed the country's victimization at the hands of the Nazis or pointed to universalising themes that blurred the historical specificity of the events. The net effect of the reaction to the miniseries was thus to perpetuate the 'good Italian' myth.

Holocaust takes viewers on a 475 minute-long journey, depicting events from the opposite perspectives of the upper middle-class German-Jewish Weiss family and of Erik Dorf, a young, unemployed lawyer who pursues a career in the SS. With the encouragement of his ruthless wife Marta,¹⁰ Erik becomes a close associate of Reinhard Heydrich and an architect of the Final Solution. In the story of the Weiss family, *Holocaust* presents viewers with a dramatised version of a typical Holocaust experience. In reference to the American context, Doneson commented that the 'environment was

6 See on this Fubini 1979; Fubini 1978a; Fubini 1978b.

7 *Il Ponte* (1978); *Critica Sociale* 1979. *Comunità* published a number of articles on Jewish culture and on anti-Semitism, e.g., Jesi 1978; Canepa 1978; Langmuir 1979.

8 Mayda 1978.

9 Toscano 2004: 736. For an overview of the historiography on Italy during the anti-Jewish campaign, see Luconi 2004.

10 The stereotyped character of Marta, presented as a Lady Macbeth in Nazi Germany, was object of several critiques in Italian newspapers, and the series was defined as sexist and anti-feminist; see Alberto Bevilacqua, "Olocausto" perchè la coscienza ricordi, *Corriere della Sera* (20 May 1979): 3; Elena Gianini Belotti, 'Ma l'Olocausto fu colpa delle donne?', *Paese Sera* (30 May 1979): 2.

ripe for a film like *Holocaust*.¹¹ The miniseries presented the Holocaust as a Jewish event, but one with a universal significance that made it relevant to all Americans. In Italy the environment was quite different.

Italian public debates on the miniseries were influenced not only by persistent cultural narratives of the Second World War, but also by the high levels of social conflict and political violence affecting Italy at the end of the 1970s. This season of violence, culminating in the Red Brigades' 1978 murder of DC President Aldo Moro, plunged the antifascist paradigm into crisis. Its prominence, which had been increasing up to that point, was irremediably undermined by the fact that it was advocated by political parties and terrorist groups alike.¹² But the Moro killing also had a more immediate political effect, as it drained the 'historical compromise' between the PCI and DC of any substance. In late 1978 and in the early months of 1979, the PCI repeatedly denounced the failure of that experience, and ultimately returned to the opposition.¹³ *Holocaust* aired during the weeks immediately preceding and following the tense National and European elections of June 3 and 10, and its press reception was undoubtedly influenced by these events.

Furthermore, in a country in which anti-imperialist feelings often led to widespread anti-Zionism, the conflict in the Middle East also entered into the surrounding debate. Finally, the press reception of *Holocaust* in Italy was influenced by the very fact that the miniseries was produced in America – provoking almost automatic allegations of trivialization from many critics. As I will argue, the charge of trivialization levelled against the miniseries in Italy was very different from the one articulated in the American context. In the US, it was television as a medium and as a format that was perceived as unsuitable for the subject-matter. In Italy, the mere fact that *Holocaust* was an American production prompted charges that it banalised Nazi crimes.

11 Doneson 2002: 150.

12 Gallerano 1999: 90.

13 Ginsborg 1990: 401–2; Crainz 2003: 581; Lanaro 1996: 444–5.

'The most talked about miniseries of all times'¹⁴

In some respects it is surprising that *Holocaust* had relatively little impact. Everything seemed set to create in Italy, as in other countries, 'the biggest TV event since the end of the war.'¹⁵ Writer Alberto Bevilacqua suggested that, unlike any other TV show, *Holocaust* required viewers actively to engage with its subject-matter.¹⁶ As a build up to the Italian broadcast of *Holocaust* (*Olocausto* in Italian), *Corriere della Sera* and the weekly magazine *Epoca* published excerpts from scriptwriter Gerald Green's novel.¹⁷ RAI aired two special programmes: a news programme entitled *TG-2 Dossier* dedicated to the debate evolving in West Germany around the extension of the statute of limitations on war crimes,¹⁸ and a late-night special, *Olocausto, il giorno dopo* (Holocaust, the day after) analysing the reception of the series in the United States, West Germany, and France.¹⁹ Many newspapers integrated accounts from camp survivors into their pres-

14 This is how *Repubblica* defined it; see "Olocausto": un tunnel chiamato nazismo, *la Repubblica* (3–4 June 1979): 16.

15 Anna Maria Mori, 'Sei milioni di vittime hanno trovato un autore', *la Repubblica* (20–21 May 1979): 19.

16 Bevilacqua, "Olocausto" perché la coscienza ricordi.

17 'La notte più oscura sull'Europa', *Corriere della Sera* (1 April 1979): 12–13; 'Olocausto', *Epoca*, 65/1487–88 (14 April 1979): 168–79; 'Olocausto', *Epoca*, 65/1489 (21 April 1979): 151–9; 'Olocausto', *Epoca*, 65/1490 (28 April 1979): 107–19; 'Olocausto', *Epoca*, 65/1491 (5 May 1979): 133–43; 'Olocausto', *Epoca*, 65/1492 (12 May 1979): 167–80; 'Olocausto', *Epoca*, 65/1493–94 (26 May 1979): 155–67; 'Olocausto', *Epoca*, 65/1495–96 (9 June 1979): 171–86; 'Olocausto', *Epoca*, 65/1497 (16 June 1979): 147–62; 'Olocausto', *Epoca* (23 June 1979) 65/1498: 111–26; 'Olocausto', *Epoca*, 65/1499 (30 June 1979): 93–100.

18 Ugo Buzzolan, 'La voce di chi conobbe i crimini dei nazisti', *La Stampa* (15 May 1979): 9. See also Massimo Sani, 'Nella Germania di "Olocausto"', *Radiocorriere TV* 56/20 (1979): 29–32.

19 Alberto Bevilacqua, 'Olocausto. Prepariamoci allo "shock"', *Corriere della Sera* (18 May 1979): 25. See also Salvo Mazzolini, 'Lo sceneggiato che ha diviso i tedeschi', *Radiocorriere TV* 56/6 (1979): 38–41; Salvo Mazzolini, 'Germania: antisemitismo. Una parola proibita', *Radiocorriere TV* 56/5 (1979): 14–15.

entation of the series.²⁰ Moreover, the President of the Italian Republic, the ambassadors of West Germany and Israel, and the leader of the Jewish community of Rome attended a symbolically important private screening on the eve of the broadcast – thus underscoring the civic value of the event.²¹ Finally, the leading TV magazine *Radiocorriere TV* published a photo-book dedicated to the miniseries; the volume was introduced in a brief foreword by Primo Levi.²²

Even so, discussion of *Holocaust* was much less widespread and dramatic in Italy than elsewhere. This difference may be explained in part by the lack of what one observer called a comprehensive Italian ‘*Holocaust* operation’²³ as compared to West Germany, France, the US, and other countries. The miniseries aired in eight episodes of one hour each, while in the other countries mentioned it was concentrated into four.²⁴ The episodes were not followed by televised open-microphone discussions lasting well into the night, as was the case in West Germany and France.²⁵ Moreover,

20 Lidia Beccaria Rolfi and Primo Levi’s account can be found in Laura Lilli, “Ci chiamavano pezzi di sporco”, *la Repubblica* (13–14 May 1979): 14–15, and Leonardo Vergani, ‘Parla Primo Levi, il numero 174517’, *Corriere della Sera* (20 May 1979): 3.

21 See ‘Pertini ricorda’, *Corriere della Sera* (18 May 1979): 25; ‘L’emozione di Pertini alla prima di Holocaust’, *la Repubblica* (18 May 1979): 5; ‘Pertini: “Mio fratello è morto così”’, *Il Giorno* (18 May 1979): 19.

22 Martinelli 1979.

23 See Rina Goren, ‘Olocausto. La massa non si sente coinvolta’, *Il Messaggero* (20 June 1979): 10.

24 In the USA, *Holocaust* aired on NBC from 16 to 19 April 1978, in Germany from 22 to 26 January 1979, in Austria, too it aired on four consecutive evenings (1–4 March 1979), while in France during February–March 1979; see Shandler 1999: 155; Bier 1980: 29; Markovits and Hayden 1980: 64; Wolf 2004: 71.

25 The Italian newspapers followed the German reception with a certain interest, whilst the American response went completely unnoticed; see Arturo Barioli, ‘Paura della storia nella Germania di oggi’, *l’Unità* (24 January 1979): 15; Arturo Barioli, ‘*Holocaust*: choc salutare per i tedeschi della RFT’, *l’Unità* (26 January 1979): 9; ‘Un plebiscito di pubblico per *Holocaust* alla Tv di Bonn’, *la Repubblica* (26 January 1979): 12; Vittorio Brunelli, ‘La tragedia del popolo ebraico è entrata nelle case dei tedeschi’, *Corriere della Sera* (24 January 1979): 4; Tito Sansa, ‘La Germania teme di rivivere in Tv lo choc dello sterminio degli ebrei’, *La Stampa* (21 January 1979): 15; Tito Sansa, ‘Stupiti

television’s weak support of the show was reflected in the press coverage, which never matched the breadth of that in other countries.

A minority of commentators expressed the hope that the series would occasion a discussion of Italy’s role in the Holocaust, of Nazism and Fascism, and of Italian anti-Semitism.²⁶ *L’Unità* columnist Giovanni Cesareo, writing on the day the first episode aired, remarked that the whole *Holocaust* operation would be more valuable if corroborated with discussions and documentaries on the roots of prejudice. After the series ended, he commented that RAI had not encouraged debate, but instead had limited itself to the role of distributing a product tested elsewhere; the broadcast was an event in terms of viewing, but was devoid of broader cultural significance.²⁷

Among the reasons for this missed opportunity was RAI’s decision to air the miniseries in May and June, rather than six months later as originally planned. This decision was interpreted variously. In historian Enzo Collotti’s view, the network intentionally timed the broadcast to coincide with the electoral campaign.²⁸ Others similarly interpreted the decision in strictly political terms; elements of both the left and the right perceived it as an electoral manoeuvre directed against their side.²⁹ Still others saw

e commossi i tedeschi alla Tv riscoprono gli orrori del Terzo Reich’, *La Stampa* (24 January 1979): 12.

26 Giulio Nascimbeni, ‘E la memoria cercava altri film’, *Corriere della Sera* (22 May 1979): 2. See also Ugo Buzzolan, ‘L’inizio di Olocausto. Romanzo d’una tragedia’, *La Stampa* (22 May 1979): 9. Ugo Buzzolan, ‘*Olocausto* inadeguato al tremendo soggetto’, *La Stampa* (29 May 1979): 9; Gianni Rondolino, ‘Il vero Olocausto nei film d’epoca’, *La Stampa* (3 June 1979): 9; Ugo Buzzolan, ‘Olocausto: spettacolo più che storia’, *La Stampa* (5 June 1979): 15; Ugo Buzzolan, ‘Bilancio di Olocausto che termina stasera’ *La Stampa* (19 June 1979): 7.

27 Giovanni Cesareo, ‘Discutere per non dimenticare’, *l’Unità* (20 May 1979): 11; Giovanni Cesareo, ‘L’“operazione” Olocausto’, *l’Unità* (18 June 1979): 8.

28 Collotti 1979: 87.

29 Anna Maria Mori, ‘Al liceo, parlando di “Olocausto”, *la Repubblica* (22 May 1979): 1, 5; on the other side, Cesare Pozza, MP of the neo-fascist MSI, described the timing of the miniseries as part of a campaign against his own party, see ‘Contrastanti le reazioni politiche’, *Corriere della Sera* (22 May 1979): 2; see also Anna Maria Mori,

purely commercial motivations behind the network's decision: the earlier broadcast date would allow the network to benefit from the programme's success in other countries.³⁰ Charges that the timing of the miniseries was politically motivated are supported by the fact that political parties exerted a determining influence on television programming in Italy.³¹ In accordance with a law passed in 1975, the RAI channels were divided up among the major political parties.³² Rete 1 (from 1982 on, RAI UNO) was controlled by the DC, and Rete 2 (later RAI DUE) by the socialist PSI. A third channel (Rete 3, later RAI TRE) run by PCI began broadcasting in December 1979.³³ In light of the politicisation of network television, it is not surprising that the leftist newspaper *Paese Sera* explained the airing of the miniseries on Rete 1 during the electoral campaign as the ruling DC's attempt to win over non-fascist right-wing sympathisers and to dissuade them from voting for the MSI. At the same time it accused DC of drawing a parallel between the Holocaust and anti-Semitism in contemporary Eastern Europe as a means to discredit the communist opposition.³⁴

Whatever the reasons behind the decision, the broadcast's awkward timing stifled debate in at least two ways. First, the most dramatic (and graphic) episodes of the miniseries aired while public attention was focused on the elections.³⁵ Moreover, the dilution of the broadcast over the span of a month greatly softened its emotional impact, transforming *Holocaust* from a major event into a television series like any other.³⁶

But television's feeble involvement is only part of the explanation for the relative lack of public reaction. One of the peculiarities of the Italian

reception of *Holocaust* was the self-serving representation of Italian history vis-à-vis the Holocaust that hailed from the entire political spectrum – although with varying emphases.³⁷ All commentators agreed that Italian viewers were not as shocked as their German counterparts due to the simple fact that they were already aware of Nazi brutality; Italy had experienced it on its own soil. Moreover, since the Republic had been born from the antifascist movement, observers assumed that its citizens had developed a comparably much deeper political consciousness.³⁸

Narratives of innocence and victimhood

Commentators drew comparisons between Italy and other countries (especially Germany) on two levels. First, they argued that Italians had greater political awareness and basic historical knowledge than other Europeans. *La Stampa* speculated that, if the shock caused by *Holocaust* in Germany was directly proportionate to the substantial ignorance of its population, then it was unlikely that Italians would be too surprised, since Nazi atrocities and the camps had been documented and represented here in memoirs, films, and TV documentaries.³⁹ Secondly, they consistently downplayed Italian involvement in the persecution and extermination of the Jews, stressing how often 'truly Italian' ordinary citizens had sheltered and rescued

'E a tempo di record arrivano le polemiche dei parlamentari', *la Repubblica* (22 May 1979): 5.

30 Felice Laudadio, 'La notte delle belve', *l'Unità* (20 May 1979): 11.

31 Anania 2003: 36.

32 Grasso 2004: xxviii–xxix; Anania 2004: 87–8.

33 See Ginsborg 2001: 111, and Bruzzone 2002: 204–7; Hibberd 2001: 159–60.

34 Ivano Cipriani, 'Questo film che narra il disumano', *Paese Sera* (20 May 1979): 3.

35 Alberto Bevilacqua, 'Cominciano le atrocità', *Corriere della Sera* (6 June 1979): 15; Goren, 'Olocausto'.

36 Ugo Buzzolan, 'Gli echi di Olocausto e una storia di mafia', *La Stampa* (23 May 1979): 9; Cesareo, 'Discutere'.

37 This accounts for another difference between Italy and other countries. In Germany, for instance, *Holocaust* was telecast in a climate of growing public criticism of the country's failure to conjugate freedom and wealth in the present with justice about the past. This tension was not part of the Italian cultural landscape. See Herf 1980: 36.

38 This is how Rete 1 Chief Director Mimmo Scarano explained the absence of widespread Italian debate on *Olocausto*; see Anna Maria Mori, "'Ovvio e banale". Ma non sono gli ingredienti della tragedia?', *la Repubblica* (23 June 1979): 14.

39 Ugo Buzzolan, 'E adesso anche gli italiani sono di fronte all'Olocausto', *La Stampa* (20 May 1979): 9.

persecuted Jews – efforts that far outbalanced the heinous crimes committed by the (Nazified and therefore ‘no longer Italian’) militia of Mussolini’s Republic.⁴⁰ On the issue of Italian innocence there was agreement between the PSI newspaper *Avanti!* and the conservative papers *Il Giornale Nuovo* and *Il Messaggero*. *Avanti!* claimed that, since 1945, Italians had come to terms with their fascist past in ways the French and the Germans had not; they had done so, the commentator reasoned, thanks to the strength of the partisan movement and to the ‘deep popular antifascism.’⁴¹ *Il Giornale Nuovo*’s commentator made a similar argument, adding that Italians could approach the show devoid of any sense of guilt.⁴² Together, these two key arguments served to perpetuate stereotypes.

But beyond simply claiming that they had come to terms with the past, Italians could also claim never to have been anti-Semites in the first place. The historian Paolo Alatri reportedly acknowledged the fact that Mussolini’s regime had imposed ‘limitations’ on Italian Jews’ civil rights, but also stressed that these restrictions were far less burdensome than those imposed in Germany or Poland.⁴³ The part of the press that identified with the centre-left stressed that what saved so many Jews in Italy was not the

40 In keeping with this attitude, one reviewer criticised the introduction into the mini-series of a fictional Italian reporter on the scene of an extermination camp – a veiled reference to Italian collaboration. The reviewer stressed that Italians had nothing to do with, and did not participate in, the extermination; see Gilberto Franchi, ‘Mostruosa macchina della morte’, *Il Resto del Carlino* (11 June 1979): 11.

41 Arturo Viola, ‘I cittadini, la cultura, la politica di fronte a *Olocausto*’, *Avanti!* (22 May 1979): 1, 8. See also Camillo Arcuri, ‘Ragazzo, siediti alla Tv c’è *Holocaust*’, *Il Giorno* (12 May 1979): 5.

42 Andrea Frullini, ‘Il divano dello sbadiglio’, *Il Giornale Nuovo* (20 June 1979): 11; see also Vittorio Gorresio interviewed in Gloria Satta, ‘Manca l’analisi storica’, *Il Messaggero* (21 May 1979): 13.

43 Paolo Alatri in Mario Pendinelli, ‘“I nostri figli stentano a credere”’, *Corriere della Sera* (20 May 1979): 3. Alatri also wrote an article that to many extents redressed the balance, stressing how odd it was that Italians knew more about the ordeal of German Jews than of Italian Jews, and that fascist persecution, far from just a token paid to the ally, was real, widespread, and often violent; see Paolo Alatri, ‘Atrocità di casa nostra’, *Il Messaggero* (27 May 1979): 3.

regime’s ‘soft’ racial discrimination,⁴⁴ but popular ‘civil disobedience’ in response to the discrimination; according to this view, Italians perceived discriminatory regulations as spurious and influenced by Nazi Germany.⁴⁵

The conservative press, in turn, tended to include the fascist authorities in this absolving narrative. The DC *Il Popolo* and MSI *Secolo d’Italia* emphasised that Italian soldiers in the occupied territories of France and Greece protected the Jews who happened to be under their jurisdiction.⁴⁶ The journalist/historian Giordano Bruno Guerri straddled the two positions, stating that the higher echelons of the regime had decided on a lenient policy toward the Jews for political reasons, and that this policy was further softened by the population’s actions.⁴⁷ The widely circulating view that Italy did not have a native cultural tradition of anti-Semitism, and had imported anti-Semitic measures only for political reasons, allowed *Il Giorno* to claim that the reactions sparked by *Holocaust* in Germany, France, and the US (countries in which there had been a rooted anti-Semitism) were difficult to understand in so tolerant a country as Italy.⁴⁸

Television played a mixed role in the construction of this breathtakingly simplistic narrative. Among the few programmes related to *Holocaust*, two were broadcast on Rete 1 during prime-time on June 1 and 8, 1979. The first special programme, entitled ‘Olocausto italiano’ (The Italian

44 Giuseppe Mayda, ‘L’Holocaust italiano’, *La Stampa* (24 April 1979): 11; Ugo Buzzolan, ‘Olocausto italiano stasera i perché’, *La Stampa* (8 June 1979): 9; E.M., ‘In Tv l’Olocausto degli ebrei italiani’, *Avanti!* (3–4 June 1979): 6.

45 Ugo Buzzolan, ‘Stasera i superstiti a “Olocausto italiano”’, *La Stampa* (1 June 1979): 11; Ugoberto Alfassio Grimaldi, ‘Esame di razzismo in casa italiana’, *Il Giorno* (4 July 1979): 3; P.d.A., ‘Un esame di coscienza: noi siamo antifascisti?’, *la Repubblica* (8 June 1979): 16.

46 ‘Gli italiani difesero gli ebrei perseguitati’, *Il Popolo* (18 May 1979): 3; ‘Da “Holocaust” un riconoscimento all’Italia “di allora”’, *Secolo d’Italia* (18 May 1979): 4.

47 Giordano Bruno Guerri, ‘Arrestate gli ebrei e metteteli in salvo’, *Il Giorno* (11 May 1979): 3.

48 Pietro Rossi, ‘Lunghe fiamme di un Olocausto’, *Il Giorno* (20 May 1979): 3. The opinion that Italian anti-Semitism was not inbuilt but adopted for imperialistic purposes was also put forward by Karl Bracher interviewed by the weekly magazine *Epoca*; see L.G., ‘E perché il popolo tedesco non si oppone?’, *Epoca*, 1499 (30 June 1979): 89.

Holocaust), was constructed as a journey through some symbolic Holocaust sites in Italy, led by survivors of the concentration camps and by Ferruccio Fölkel, author of the first historical study of the Risiera di San Sabba camp.⁴⁹ By reconstructing episodes of the Holocaust unknown to much of the public, the programme intended to show viewers that the Italians, too, were involved in the Holocaust.⁵⁰

The second programme, entitled ‘Olocausto italiano: perchè?’ (The Italian Holocaust: Why?), was a roundtable conducted by the historians Vittorio Emanuele Giuntella and Giuseppe Mayda, former Resistance members Luigi Firpo and Stuart Hood (a British intelligence officer who fought with the partisans), survivor Giuliana Tedeschi, and Jewish public figures Elio Toaff, Tullia Zevi, Luisella Mortara Ottolenghi, and Vittorio Dan Segre.⁵¹ Among the topics covered were the Italian public response to the miniseries, the resurgence of anti-Semitism, and the sensitive issue of Italians’ conduct during the Holocaust. The station preceded the discussion with a fragment of a fascist newsreel showing Nazi troops rounding up Jewish civilians while a triumphant voiceover hailed the ‘German ally.’ Anchorman Arrigo Levi set the tone for the programme by reiterating the

49 Fölkel 1979.

50 Victor Ciuffa, ‘Venerdì in Tv i sopravvissuti raccontano’, *Corriere della Sera* (30 May 1979): 23.

51 Vittorio Emanuele Giuntella was an Army officer who refused to join the Italian Social Republic and was deported to the camps. After the war, he wrote Giuntella, Vittorio Emanuele 1979. Giuseppe Mayda is a historian who has written about the deportations from Italy. Among his books is Mayda 2002. Luigi Firpo and Stuart Hood participated in the Resistance, the former within the ranks of the radical liberal Partito d’Azione, the latter as a British officer who escaped from a fascist camp. Giuliana Tedeschi was one of the first Jewish survivors of Auschwitz to publish a memoir, Tedeschi 1946. Elio Toaff was the Chief Rabbi of Rome, Tullia Zevi was vice-president of the *Unione delle Comunità Israelitiche Italiane* (Union of Italian Jewish Communities, UCII). Luisella Mortara Ottolenghi was Chair of the *Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea* (CDEC). Diplomat Vittorio Dan Segre, now retired, was a witness to and participant in the founding of the State of Israel.

claim that no other nation had helped Jews during the Holocaust more than Italy.⁵²

One of the points raised during the debate was that, although Italians had not participated in the fascist anti-Semitic campaign in the past, recent expressions of hatred for the Jews from the right⁵³ and increasing anti-Semitism disguised as anti-Zionism on the left constituted cause for alarm in the present.⁵⁴ The programme was criticised by *Corriere della Sera* for having avoided the question of responsibility for the Italian Holocaust and for failing to remind viewers that many who had been anti-Semitic ‘black-shirts’ still held responsible positions.⁵⁵ One of the guests, Tullia Zevi, disassociated herself from the programme, noting that her references to the Christian roots of anti-Semitism had been omitted.⁵⁶

With a few isolated exceptions, the notion that Italian guilt needed to be acknowledged was put forward only by the left-wing press. A combination of historical and more recent developments contributed to this trend. As the left saw it, the more fascist culpability was emphasised, the more antifascist values were enhanced. Moreover, for the communists, the decision to return to the opposition opened the way for criticism of the conduct of sections of Italian society during the war, as well as of postwar Italy’s failure to come to terms with the fascist heritage. *L’Unità* praised

52 Ugo Buzzolan, ‘La realtà nazista non è “Olocausto”’, *La Stampa* (10 June 1979): 11.

53 Only weeks before the telecast of *Olocausto*, neo-Nazis in the town of Varese had shouted insults at the players of the Maccabi Tel Aviv basketball team during a game. Their actions caused a wave of indignation and increased concern about the resurgence of anti-Semitism. See Gianni Corbi, ‘Hitlerjugend, sezione di Varese,’ *L’Espresso*, 25/11 (18 March 1979): 5.

54 P.d.A., “Esame”; Pier Maria Poletti, ‘Le immagini della nostra colpa’, *Il Giorno* (9 June 1979): 1–2.

55 Alberto Bevilacqua, ‘Olocausto. I “boia” sono ancora fra noi?’, *Corriere della Sera* (9 June 1979): 20.

56 Tullia Zevi, ‘Olocausto italiano è stato censurato?’, *Corriere della Sera* (13 June 1979): 20. The same newspaper hosted a reply by Arrigo Levi stating that the cuts were only motivated by the limited time conceded to the programme, see Arrigo Levi, “Non ho censurato Olocausto italiano”, *Corriere della Sera* (14 June 1979): 28.

Olocausto italiano for not presenting fascist persecutions as *'buone'* (kind),⁵⁷ but criticised Arrigo Levi's claim that 'Jews had been persecuted by fascists, not by Italians.'⁵⁸ Similarly, the PCI-affiliated *Paese Sera* hinted at Vatican responsibility, noting that Fascism had promulgated its racial laws in Italy without fear of excommunication.⁵⁹ In the 'new left' newspaper *il manifesto*, Jewish sociologist Ugo Caffaz proposed a similar critique, noting that the 'Germanisation' of anti-Semitism in Italian discourse was a means to shift fascist and Italian responsibility onto a completely external cause.⁶⁰ Later, Caffaz concluded that the debate around the miniseries strengthened this tendency further.⁶¹

Italy as victim: Selective receptions

The widespread sense of 'innocence'⁶² characterising the Italian reception of *Holocaust* accounts for another important facet of the debate. Many commentators stressed that the Italian discussion, in contrast to that in Germany, focused mainly on the quality of the miniseries rather than on how appropriate it was to screen it.⁶³ The only voices opposing the

57 Giorgio Fabre, 'Cronache di un genocidio', *l'Unità* (3 June 1979): 8.

58 Ibio Paolucci, 'Olocausto italiano: quando, come e perché', *l'Unità* (10 June 1979): 9.

59 Giulio Gorla, 'Non follia, politica', *Paese Sera* (17 May 1979): 3.

60 Roberto Livi, 'Gli ebrei di sinistra discutono, sulla difensiva, di Olocausto', *il manifesto* (27 May 1979): 3.

61 Caffaz 1979.

62 Given the tone of the Italian debate engendered by *Holocaust*, the best cultural context for comparison is Austria. A widespread notion of *guiltlessness* characterised both Austrian and Italian politics of memory about Nazism and WWII. Also, in both countries, public reception of the miniseries displayed similar patterns of short-term viewer enthusiasm, but with little lasting impact. On the Austrian reception of *Holocaust*, see Markovits and Hayden 1980, especially 56 and 68.

63 'Odissea dei Weiss dal 1939 al 1941', *Il Giorno* (3 June 1979): 19.

broadcast came from the right, which feared a wave of anti-German sentiment that might weaken support for a crucial bulwark against Soviet expansion.⁶⁴

These discussions imply that Italian public memory was unable to reflect upon the historical responsibility of having been victimisers in relation to the Holocaust. As noted elsewhere in this book, the dominant narratives about the Second World War paved the way for a widespread culture of victimhood and a narrative of redemptive Resistance. In a nutshell, the discourse attributed to the entire Italian nation the position of innocent victim; there was no room for the specificity of Jewish victims. Jews could only be included into a broader narrative of national victimhood. The space of victimhood was so imbued with Italian pain that participants in the discussion could not even see, let alone acknowledge, a (qualitative) difference in Jewish suffering; recognising such a difference would have required a redefinition of these consolidated self-representational categories.

Likewise, this powerful narrative of Italian victimhood explains the complete silence surrounding the critique of the Christian Churches contained in the miniseries.⁶⁵ In one sequence, Erik Dorf is confronted by Father Bernhard Lichtenberg, a character based on the Berlin-based Catholic priest of that name who publicly protested against the persecution of the Jews and was recognised as a 'Righteous among the Nations' by Yad Vashem in 2004. When the SS officer reminded the priest that Church leaders were either neutral or supportive of Nazi policies, Lichtenberg's character replied 'then I am obliged to draw a distinction between what Christianity really is, and how men can distort and betray it.' Doneson notes that there were several references to past Christian persecutions of Jews scattered throughout the miniseries.⁶⁶ None of these episodes was mentioned in the many reviews published in Italy. The Catholic paper *Avvenire* offered a completely different interpretation of the relationship

64 Paolo Cattaneo, 'I vinti', *Il Giornale nuovo* (13 June 1979): 5; Renzo Lodoli, 'Molti "Olocausto". Perché uno solo?', *Secolo d'Italia*, Cultura Supplement (2 June 1979): iv.

65 Doneson 2002: 163.

66 Doneson detects at least three instances in which this discourse is stated; see Doneson 2002: 165.

between Catholicism and Nazism, describing Catholics as the first group to be persecuted by the Nazis – followed by socialists, communists, and then Jews – and claimed furthermore that Catholics were the only group to have thoroughly opposed Nazi policies.⁶⁷ Notably, the article does not mention the negative references to the Church contained in the dialogue of the miniseries.

‘Not bad, for an American product.’ Leftist responses to *Holocaust*

Since Italians were, supposedly, well informed about *Holocaust*’s subject matter, reviews and discussions focused on whether the miniseries could be useful as an aide to memory (albeit an Americanised and trivialised memory) of the European catastrophe, or whether its flaws outweighed its merits.

The word commentators used most commonly to describe *Holocaust* was ‘*polpettone*’⁶⁸ (‘hammy’, literally ‘meatloaf’). Sometimes they added the specification that this was ‘American *polpettone*’⁶⁹ or ‘sentimental *polpettone*’⁷⁰ (sentimental exactly because it was American). Commentators

67 Raimondo Manzini, ‘Quella resistenza anonima e eroica’, *Avvenire* (20 May 1979): 3.

68 See Goffredo Parise, ‘Un telefilm troppo “normale” per contenere la tragedia del genocidio?’, *Corriere della Sera* (19 May 1979): 1–2; Cesareo, “Operazione”; R.L., ‘Tv. Inizia l’operazione Olocausto. È un telefilm antinazista o un pamphlet filoisraeliano?’, *il manifesto* (20 May 1979): 5; Goren, ‘Olocausto’; Domenico Bartoli, ‘Quando un polpettone è utile’, *Il Giornale Nuovo* (23 June 1979): 3.

69 Giulia Borgese, ‘Ma quale impressione vi hanno fatto i nazisti vedendo Olocausto in Tv?’, *Corriere della Sera* (22 May 1979): 2.

70 Ricciardetto, ‘Olocausto: perché l’uomo diventa mostro’, *Epoca*, 1495/96 (9 June 1979): 21–3.

decried the miniseries for reproducing all of Hollywood’s clichés,⁷¹ and for depicting evil as the problem of a few deranged individuals that society could restrain without having to question the system’s deep structures.⁷² Those who praised the miniseries as well as those who faulted it agreed that it was analytically weak and aimed almost exclusively at the manipulation of emotions.⁷³

Discussions of the miniseries emphasised the fact that it was an Americanised version of the Holocaust. The poet and intellectual Edoardo Sanguineti described *Holocaust* as ‘Nazism à la American, amply Westernised [referring to the film genre]... The concentration camps are transformed into Hollywoodian penal colonies, novelised and *Gone-with-the-Wind*-ised.’⁷⁴ This classic film was referred to frequently in public discussion – a fact that reflected the widespread perception that the miniseries had adapted the Holocaust to the tropes of the American epic genre. Bevilacqua decried the melodramatic treatment of history, claiming that the miniseries watered down historical specificity, inaccurately representing SS officers as members of the KKK.⁷⁵ Another observer argued that the transformation of the Holocaust into the ‘*Gone with the Wind* of WWII’⁷⁶ could explain the miniseries’ success, because, as a melodrama, it allowed viewers to approach the tragedy without raising questions of personal responsibility. In *il manifesto* the film critic Enrico Ghezzi adopted a somewhat unorthodox version

71 Gianni Rondolino, ‘Il vero Olocausto nei film d’epoca’, *La Stampa* (3 June 1979): 9.

72 Buzzolan, ‘Bilancio’.

73 As an example, see Cesare Cavalleri, ‘Un’enfasi che non va alle radici’, *Avvenire* (29 May 1979): 8; see also C. R., ‘Tra tensione e paura precipita la tragedia’, *Il Giornale* (4 June 1979): 9.

74 Edoardo Sanguineti, ‘Un “Holocaust” con tanto Sue’, *Paese Sera* (17 May 1979), p. 3; Bevilacqua, “Olocausto” perché la coscienza ricordi?

75 Alberto Bevilacqua, ‘E ora ricominciamo a discutere’, *Corriere della Sera* (20 June 1979): 20. For a similar critique of the representation of the Resistance in the Warsaw ghetto constructed as an episode taken from a Western film, see Angelo Gangarossa, ‘Una resistenza girata come un western’, *Il Messaggero* (20 June 1979): 10.

76 Fausto Pozzato, ‘Un’opera mediocre colpita da mediocrità’, *il Resto del Carlino* (18 May 1979): 3.

of the same parallel – unorthodox because it defended the miniseries. He described *Holocaust* as a ‘catastrophic *Gone with the Wind*’, offering a bearable version of history that managed to remain emotionally engaging while leaving the excesses that characterised the Holocaust off screen. There was no point in focusing on the miniseries’ mediocrity, Ghezzi argued, since its mediocrity was precisely its strength: it was a melodrama that never dared to become a tragedy and, for this reason, did not alienate viewers.⁷⁷

Clearly, at issue in the debate around the miniseries was the ‘trivialisation’ of the Holocaust. Observers reflected on television’s inbuilt triviality and on its inability to convey historical depth,⁷⁸ let alone the immensity of the Holocaust.⁷⁹ Similarly, in the US, Elie Wiesel’s seminal (and far from isolated) critique damned *Holocaust* for ‘transform[ing] an ontological event into soap-opera.’⁸⁰ The similarities between the two debates must not be overstated, however. Wiesel’s claim resulted not only from the perception of television as an intrinsically trivialising medium, but also from the assumption that the Holocaust defies conventional notions of aesthetics; in other words, in his view the ‘non-representability’ of the Holocaust makes it impossible to compare to other tragedies.⁸¹ In Italy, on the contrary, commentators saw the trivialising effect not so much in the medium of television, but in American mass culture.

77 Enrico Ghezzi, ‘Come un Olocausto divenne spettacolo’, *il manifesto* (23 May 1979): 5. See also Edith Bruck, ‘Orrore sopportabile’, *La Stampa* (20 June 1979): 3.

78 Alberto Moravia, ‘Prodotto privo di arte’, *La Stampa* (20 June 1979): 3; Cesareo, “Operazione”; Giuliana Tedeschi in Poletti, ‘Immagini’; Renato Minore, ‘Il dolore rappresentato’, *Il Messaggero* (19 May 1979): 4.

79 Anna Maria Mori, ‘La violenza: come?’, *la Repubblica* (20–21 May 1979): 19; Sergio Surchi, ‘Olocausto: i limiti e la lezione’, *Il Popolo* (19 June 1979): 5; Andrea Frullini, ‘Lo sconvolgente Olocausto resuscita i vecchi fantasmi’, *Il Giornale nuovo* (20 May 1979): 11.

80 Elie Wiesel, ‘Trivializing the Holocaust: Semi-Fact and Semi-Fiction’, *The New York Times* (16 April 1978), sec. 2: 1, 29. In a similar vein, film critic Molly Haskell among many asked ‘how dare actors presume to imagine and tell us what it felt like!’, see Molly Haskell, ‘A Failure to Connect’, *New York*, 11, no. 20 (May 15, 1978): 79, referenced in Novick 1999: 212.

81 For the immediate American debate, see Shandler 1999: 167–70.

Moreover, in the Italian cultural context, the concept of Americanisation contained (for both the left and the right) a politicised semantic core. On the left, Americanisation was not just a synonym for trivialisation; it was also understood as a troubling example of how the American political-cultural establishment was able to set the agenda for European debates.⁸² Thus, commentators on the left defended the miniseries only as an aide to memory and/or a pedagogical tool for the younger generation⁸³ – never as a quality production in its own right. In this regard, Italian intellectuals on the left found themselves in the same situation as their German counterparts, who had to carefully balance approval of an explicitly anti-Nazi product against wariness about the American culture industry.⁸⁴ An article written by the poet Giovanni Giudici and published in *l’Unità* serves as an example of this type of attitude (and a display of deep-seated prejudice). For Giudici, *Holocaust* was both an instrument of the ‘powerful American-Jewish lobby’,⁸⁵ and an invitation to think again about those years and about how the Nazis’ crimes could have occurred.

Fears about the trivialization of history and American cultural colonisation dovetailed with traditional anti-Americanism amongst intellectuals; for example, a review published in *Avanti!* criticised *Holocaust*’s sentimentalism while at the same time maintaining it was ‘not bad, for an American product.’⁸⁶ These views further combined with a certain wariness about

82 Sergio S., ‘Possono i sentimenti generare cambiamenti’, *Lotta Continua* (22 May 1979): 10–11.

83 This is, for instance, the opinion expressed by the literary scholar Alberto Asor Rosa, ‘È utile ai giovani, funziona’, *La Stampa* (20 June 1979): 3. See also Carlo Scaringi, ‘Un lieto fine fuori posto per motivi di cassetta’, *Avanti!* (19 June 1979): 15; Gianni Rodari, ‘Una storia da non dimenticare’, *Paese Sera* (21 May 1979): 1.

84 See Herf 1980: 38. However, there are substantial differences between the Italian and the German receptions. In West Germany, the earthquake caused by *Holocaust* in popular conscience was used by part of the right against left-wing intellectuals’ influence in national culture. The success of *Holocaust* was celebrated by the German right with anti-intellectualist tones that did not find place in Italy. See Herf 1980: 40–3.

85 Giovanni Giudici, “Olocausto”: il libro e la memoria, *l’Unità* (23 April 1979): 7.

86 Scaringi, ‘Lieto fine’.

disguised pro-Israel ‘propaganda.’ The ‘new left’ newspaper *Lotta Continua* saw in *Holocaust* elements of both Westernisation (i.e., Americanisation) and the ‘Zionification’ of European Jewish culture.⁸⁷ *Il manifesto* was so wary about the possible pro-Israel message in *Holocaust* that it published two pieces in which the authors seemed to forget that the miniseries was primarily concerned with Nazi crimes; the paper published an apology in the next issue.⁸⁸

The left identified *Holocaust*’s lack of historical analysis as another weakness inherent in this ‘Americanisation.’ One element of this critique – common among leftist circles throughout Europe – stemmed from Horkheimer’s dictum that ‘whoever does not want to talk about capitalism should remain silent about fascism.’⁸⁹ The show’s identification of Nazism with anti-Semitism was perceived (and not only on the left) as flawed, since it failed to address middle-class participation in the Nazi movement, the connections between the Third Reich and financial capitalism, and the broader system of Nazi terror engulfing Roma and Sinti, homosexuals, and the mentally ill.⁹⁰ The communists criticised these omissions as potentially dangerous because, in their view, the failure to establish links between

87 S. ‘Possono i sentimenti’; Sanguineti, “Holocaust”.

88 See Samir Kariuti, ‘Hitler, sembra dire L’Espresso presentando “Olocausto”, forse era un arabo. E chi condanna oggi Israele puzza di nazismo, anche se nei lager ci vive davvero’, *il manifesto* (20 May 1979), p. 3; R. L., ‘Tv. Inizia l’operazione Olocausto’; ‘Sbagliando si impara’, *il manifesto* (22 May 1979), p. 1. The fear of a pro-Zionist message in *Holocaust* was clearly expressed in very similar terms by all the European far-left; for the French case, see Wolf 2004: 73. Anti-Zionism also defined the reception of the miniseries in West Germany’s “new left”; see Herf 1980: 43–6, and Postone 1980: 98.

89 Max Horkheimer, *Autoritärer Staat. Die Juden und Europa* (Amsterdam: De Munter, 1967): 8, quoted in Herf 1980: 31.

90 Bevilacqua, “Olocausto. Prepariamoci allo “shock””; Buzzolan, ‘Olocausto: spettacolo più che storia’; Cesareo, “Operazione”; Giorgio Spini and Franco Ferrarotti in Viola, ‘Cittadini’; Giancarlo Quaranta in ‘L’Olocausto in realtà fu più atroce’, *Il Giorno* (22 May 1979): 3; Giuliano Montaldo in Satta, ‘Manca l’analisi’; Sanguineti, “Holocaust”; Gianfranco Petrillo, ‘Quei lager davanti a noi’, *l’Unità* (20 May 1979): 3. See also, from a non-leftist perspective, Gilberto Franchi, ‘La mostruosa macchina nazista’, *il Resto del Carlino* (21 May 1979): 7.

Nazism and German capitalism paved the way for a de-historicised representation of the Third Reich as a form of totalitarianism indistinguishable from the Soviet model – a representation that could be used to put forward anticommunist messages.⁹¹

One leftist critique of the Americanisation of the Holocaust – which appeared in the pages of *Avanti!* – questioned the very right of Americans to represent a European genocide. *Avanti!* argued that because Americans had not experienced the Nazi occupation, and since their only firsthand knowledge of genocide was acquired during the atrocities they themselves had caused, they were not in a position to tell the story of the Holocaust.⁹² Since American film-makers did not have the privileged perspective of their European counterparts,⁹³ and had not experienced their genuine grief, a Hollywood production such as *Holocaust* could serve only the present political concerns of the American establishment.⁹⁴

A pointed rejoinder to these various leftist critiques came from Luigi Pintor in a front page column published in *il manifesto*. Pintor defended *Holocaust* and noted that although it was not analytical, neither was the miniseries manipulative nor exceedingly inaccurate. He argued further that if the Holocaust was used for Israeli or American propaganda, it was also because the left had been unable to acknowledge it fully as a break in civilisation. If a programme that uncompromisingly denounced the Nazi horror was received on the left with hostility rather than approval,

91 Cesareo, ‘Discutere per non dimenticare’; S., ‘Possono i sentimenti’; Cipriani, ‘Questo film’.

92 Carlo Scaringi, ‘Positivo avvio di “Olocausto”: pagina di storia da meditare’, *Avanti!* (22 May 1979): 15. This position was almost echoed by Novick and Finkelstein two decades later; see Novick 1999: 15, and Finkelstein 2003: 72.

93 This is also the critique expressed by Goffredo Parise, who faulted *Olocausto* for lacking the ‘deep historical sentiment’ of Rossellini’s *Paisà* or Bassani’s novel *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini*; see Parise, “Telefilm”.

94 Part of the left expected a direct military American involvement in the Middle East as a result of the political unrest in the area after the Iranian revolution. See the leftist Italian Jew Livia Rokach’s comments in Roberto Livi, ‘Gli ebrei di sinistra discutono, sulla difensiva, di Olocausto’, *il manifesto* (27 May 1979): 3.

then this was a sign of an intrinsic cultural weakness upon which the left needed to reflect.⁹⁵

Some of Pintor's comments were similar to those expressed by Primo Levi.⁹⁶ In Levi's view, *Holocaust* was simple enough to become popular, while at the same time it displayed due respect for the historical subject-matter.⁹⁷ Levi agreed that the Holocaust was unique, but his public position was that the programme had managed to convey this uniqueness.⁹⁸ His main criticism of the miniseries was that, since it did not provide information about the context that allowed Nazism to rise to power, it left the impression that Nazi anti-Semitism was the product of a few demonic fanatics or, at the other extreme, the result of inherent German evil. He criticised the miniseries' representation of the Warsaw ghetto revolt on similar grounds. In his view, *Holocaust* failed to explain the Jewish specificity of the uprising. In the end, he expressed the hope that the series would open a debate on the Italian role in the Holocaust. In fact, although he stressed that 'the greater part of the Italian population proved to be immune to the racist poison,' he noted that the roundups ordered by the Nazi occupier 'were often carried out by the police and by the fascist militias, and not always reluctantly.'⁹⁹

95 Luigi Pintor, 'Olocausto. Storia nostra', *il manifesto* (1 June 1979): 1–2.

96 Levi 1997g; Levi 1997b.

97 Levi 1997d: 1268.

98 Levi 1997c: 1275–6. Carole Angier claims that, in private, Levi agreed with Wiesel's view that *Holocaust* was cheap and offensive; see Angier 2002: 604.

99 Levi 1997c: 1279.

Universalism and anticommunism: Right-wing readings of *Holocaust*

Leftist notions of Americanisation were countered by observers on the right. Like other European conservative newspapers,¹⁰⁰ *Il Popolo* explicitly took issue against those who labelled *Holocaust* a 'Western' film and a Hollywood-ised version of World War Two. According to one observer, the six million deaths at the heart of the miniseries' story should have prompted reviewers to evaluate it differently from other productions. He acknowledged the inadequateness of the miniseries vis-à-vis the events represented, but also praised its capacity to attract an enormous and extremely varied mass of viewers.¹⁰¹ Another writer for *Il Popolo* praised the miniseries for leading its audience to empathise with the characters, and moving them to question their assumptions about the war.¹⁰²

In an article in *Il Giornale nuovo*, one commentator offered a defence of the miniseries, stating that the American values presented in it were universal and could withstand critical inquiry even when banalised through the medium of television.¹⁰³ However, this view did not go entirely unchallenged in the newspaper. In two separate articles, another observer maintained that commercial exploitation of the Holocaust was in itself corrosive, nurturing greater hatred (presumably against Germans and former fascists),

100 See Karl-Heinz Bohrer, 'Holocaust – Eine Prüfung', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (28 September 1978), Feuilleton: 1, and 'Wenn "Holocaust" kommt', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (17 January 1979), Feuilleton: 1, referenced in Herf 1980: 38.

101 Sergio Surchi, 'Non è "Via col vento"', *Il Popolo* (29 May 1979): 8; Sergio Surchi, 'Quando l'orrore diventò legge', *Il Popolo* (22 May 1979): 9.

102 Domenico Sassoli, '"Olocausto": gli orrori dello sterminio degli ebrei', *Il Popolo* (20 May 1979): 3.

103 Gregor Von Ruzzari, '"Olocausto" e lo spirito del tempo', *Il Giornale Nuovo* (9 June 1979): 3.

and that it placed an obstacle in the path of healthy forgetting (a view shared by many readers of the same newspaper).¹⁰⁴

In other words, the Italian right received this American representation of the Holocaust in two different and contradictory ways. In arguments similar to those offered by the West German Right,¹⁰⁵ some reviewers decried *Holocaust* for re-opening a black page of fascist history that would be better left forgotten, and for tarnishing the image of West Germany at a point in history when (the right feared) the government of the country could shift further to the left.¹⁰⁶

At the same time, observers on the right received the 'Americanisation' of the Holocaust favourably because it offered them the opportunity to imbue the tragedy with anticommunist 'meaning.' The historian and Republican Party MP Giuseppe Galasso asserted that *Holocaust* showed anti-Israeli forces (i.e., most of the communist and the 'new left') that religion, culture, and tradition – not class – had been the engine of history leading to the extermination.¹⁰⁷ Ironically, the miniseries, which could be seen as a sign of the particularist shift that dominated the American social and cultural landscape beginning in the 1980s,¹⁰⁸ was read by sections of Italian culture as 'universal.' The explanation lies in the fact that Italian cultural identity was characterised by powerful notions of class and ideology.

104 Paolo Cattaneo, 'Rifutarsi all'Olocausto', *Il Giornale Nuovo* (30 May 1979): 5, and Cattaneo, 'Vinti'; 'La parola ai lettori: argomenti positivi' *Il Giornale Nuovo* (31 May 1979): 23; 'La parola ai lettori: basta con gli orrori', *Il Giornale Nuovo* (6 June 1979): 21; 'La parola ai lettori: al momento sbagliato', *Il Giornale Nuovo* (7 June 1979): 23.

105 See Herf 1980: 36–7.

106 Italo Pietra, 'Paura della Germania e Olocausto', *Il Messaggero* (24 May 1979): 2. See also Gasterbeiter, 'Holocaust dopo radici e prima dello squalo n. 3', *il manifesto* (11 April 1979): 5. Right-wing fears of an anti-German wave and of a possible allegiance between Bonn's government and the left were also present in the French debate on *Holocaust*, where it had strong political undertones. In France, Giscard's UDF opposed the broadcast in the attempt to establish a closer tie with the German establishment, while his opponent Chirac's party RPR and the left criticised this attitude by adopting a charged Holocaust rhetoric; see Wolf 2004: 71–2.

107 Giuseppe Galasso in Pendenelli, "Nostri figli".

108 See Kauvar 1993.

A representation of the Holocaust that focused on cultural belonging and elementary notions of liberalism could be read as universal in Italy, since it did not directly touch upon the issues that divided Italian public debate: class and ideological affiliation.¹⁰⁹ In the absence of an Italian strand of discourse on cultural particularism, the miniseries' omission of these two potentially divisive factors allowed commentators to confer upon it the most diverse and often contradictory 'meanings.'

The 'meaning' of *Holocaust*

Across the Italian political spectrum, observers agreed that *Holocaust* offered an Americanised version of the destruction of the European Jews, and that it did not offer deep analysis or provide explicit meanings. The disagreement became clear in the discussion of the conclusions to be drawn. In general terms, commentators who related *Holocaust* to other tragedies and genocides outnumbered those who associated it specifically with anti-Semitism. Put differently, *Holocaust* was interpreted (or used) more as a series about human catastrophes than as explicitly concerned with hatred of the Jews. Among those who did make the explicit connection to anti-Semitism, philosopher Luigi Firpo and writer Alberto Bevilacqua emphasised that *Holocaust's* contribution lay in the fact that the attendant discussion would uncover anti-Semitic biases on both the left and the right.¹¹⁰ Primo Levi used the occasion of the broadcast to put Nazi anti-Semitism in its historical context.¹¹¹ With these and a few other exceptions, the references to anti-Semitism during the course of the public debate used the term for political purposes. The day *Holocaust* premiered on Italian TV, *il manifesto*

109 See Elisabetta Bonucci, "Olocausto" visto con due testimoni, *l'Unità* (22 May 1979): 3.

110 Bevilacqua, 'Olocausto. Prepariamoci allo "shock".'

111 Levi 1997c; Levi 1997d.

published an article written by Samir Kariuti, the PLO's spokesman in Italy, in which he rejected the links that some observers had made between the pro-Palestinian cause and Nazism, anti-Zionism, and anti-Semitism.¹¹² The target of this polemic was the non-communist leftist weekly magazine *L'Espresso*, which focused its presentation of the miniseries on the discussion of current forms of anti-Semitism, including those produced by PCI and the 'new left'.¹¹³ On the same day, a commenter in the Socialist *Avanti!* wrote that both Israelis and Palestinians were entitled to have their own states supported by the international community; he went on to say that 'a tragedy cannot be overcome with another tragedy'.¹¹⁴

Television broadcast schedules played a role in furthering this type of politicisation of *Holocaust*. Immediately after the first episode concluded on Rete 1 on the evening of 20 May, Rete 2 – run by the moderately pro-Arab PSI¹¹⁵ – broadcast a journalistic report entitled *Palestinians of the Diaspora*. With statements such as 'the Jewish Holocaust cannot be solved with the Holocaust of other peoples'¹¹⁶ and 'we [the Palestinians] are the Jews of the Middle East, we too have our Holocaust',¹¹⁷ the programme became part of the miniseries' early reception; many newspapers printed discussions of the two television events on the same page. Some participants in the debate protested: the Socialist MP Francesco Colucci defined the linkage as a

112 Kariuti, 'Hitler'.

113 Cristina Mariotti, 'Siamo tutti ebrei', *L'Espresso*, 25/20 (20 May 1979): 80–97; Cristina Mariotti, 'Ora il nemico si chiama Sion', *L'Espresso*, 25/20 (20 May 1979): 83; 'Il razzista è sempre pronto', *L'Espresso*, 25/20 (20 May 1979): 85; Guido Fubini, 'Compagno antisemita', *L'Espresso*, 25/20 (20 May 1979): 89.

114 Roberto Villetti, 'Si ripetono tragedie che chiamiamo "inumane"', *Avanti!* (20 May 1979), *Cultura Supplement*: i.

115 On different occasions PSI's leader Bettino Craxi made use of his political weight in favour of the PLO. He was the first prime minister of a Western country to meet Yasser Arafat; see Dieckhoff 1988: 272. During the Achille Lauro crisis he defined Arafat as a Mazzini of our times; see Romano 2006: 102.

116 Buzzolan, 'Inizio'.

117 'Il viaggio di un popolo verso la patria lontana', *la Repubblica* (20–21 May 1979): 19.

contribution to hatemongering.¹¹⁸ The *Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea* in Milan (Centre of Contemporary Jewish Documentation, CDEC) labelled the Rete 2 broadcast inopportune although it remarked favourably on its contents.¹¹⁹ The majority of commentators simply did not question the connection between the two programmes, and either merely registered their juxtaposition,¹²⁰ or expressed their approval of the Rete 2 report.¹²¹ Two other, minor strands of reflection provoked by the miniseries' broadcast had to do with the Christian roots of anti-Semitism and its rise in USSR. Both positions served political purposes, and can be dismissed as shallow at best.¹²²

While participants in the debate surrounding the miniseries paid scant attention to anti-Semitism, they frequently and repetitively linked the broadcast to other tragedies. *Holocaust* served as a point of comparison for the ordeal of the 'boat people' from South-East Asia (which made front-page news in June 1979),¹²³ slavery in America (a link between *Holocaust*

118 'Ma domenica c'era anche un "controlocausto"', *Paese Sera* (23 May 1979): 13.

119 Anna Maria Mori, 'E a tempo di record arrivano le polemiche'.

120 Buzzolan, 'Inizio'; 'Il viaggio'; G.L., 'La "diaspora" dei palestinesi', *l'Unità* (21 May 1979): 6.

121 Roberto Livi, 'Tv. "Là, in Palestina dove non posso tornare". Lo Speciale TG2 andato in onda domenica', *il manifesto* (22 May 1979): 5; Ennio Chiodi, 'La diaspora palestinese', *Il Popolo* (23 May 1979): 9.

122 See 'Contrastanti le reazioni politiche'; Rosellina Balbi, 'Ecco l'offesa: siete nati', *la Repubblica* (13–14 May 1979): 14; 'Olocausto: oggi in Russia gli ebrei sono perseguitati', *La Discussione*, 27/22 (4 June 1979): 16. 'Olocausto continua in Russia e "l'Unità" continua a tacere' *La Discussione* 27/23 (11 June 1979): 25.

123 'Basta con l'olocausto dei profughi del Vietnam', *Corriere della Sera* (19 June 1979): 1; Paolo Giuntella, 'L'Olocausto continua', *Il Popolo* (3 July 1979): 3; Cesare Cavalleri, 'Guardiamo più da vicino l'orrore di "Olocausto"', *Avvenire* (19 June 1979): 8; Mons. Ersilio Tonini, 'Quel campo di sterminio è nei mari del Vietnam', *Avvenire* (8 July 1979): 2; Ludovico Garruccio, 'Gli indifferenti', *il Resto del Carlino* (21 June 1979): 1. The link established between *Holocaust* and the ordeal of the Vietnamese refugees was not an Italian prerogative, as the American case proved; see Doneson 2002: 148.

and its predecessor, ABC's *Roots*),¹²⁴ Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile,¹²⁵ the Arab-Israeli conflict, and other catastrophes.¹²⁶

The debate on the Arab-Israeli conflict engendered by *Holocaust* offers an insight into the Italian Jewish community's self-understanding. During the course of the debate, Renzo De Felice referred to that community as 'numerically, economically, and culturally non-influential.'¹²⁷ In some sense, discussion surrounding the miniseries bears this out. In contrast to countries such as the United States and France, where Jewish organisations articulated a range of specifically Jewish positions, in Italy no identifiable Jewish voice emerged. An exception to this relative silence was the episode of *Sorgente di vita* (Spring of Life) aired on 18 June, a bi-weekly half-hour program produced by the Italian Jewish Communities' Union on Rete 2. Hosted by Tullia Zevi, guests Rabbi Riccardo Di Segni, sociologists Leo Nahon and Ugo Caffaz, and historian Liliana Picciotto Fargion debated the miniseries' impact on viewers, responses to the Holocaust, and the roots of anti-Semitism. The other significant exception was a roundtable on the miniseries published in *il manifesto* and attended by historian Guido Valabrega, journalist Livia Rokach, pro-Palestinian Israeli activist Felicia Langer, and Ugo Caffaz. During the roundtable, the discussants focused on contemporary issues, decrying the identification of Jewishness with Zionism and the Zionist message that they saw in *Holocaust*.¹²⁸

Non-Jewish commentators were even more prone to draw universalising conclusions from the miniseries. Thus, many interpreted *Holocaust* as a story about violence – no different from the violence that Italy was expe-

124 Giovanni Serafini, 'Nella sala buia sfilano i barbari', *il Resto del Carlino* (18 May 1979): 3.

125 As representatives of the Chilean refugees' community in Italy stressed, see 'I giudizi davanti alla Tv', *Corriere della Sera* (11 June 1979): 15.

126 'Le lettere della domenica: l'intelligenza non vuole olocausti', *La Stampa* (10 June 1979): 7; Villetti, 'Si ripetono tragedie'; Pietro Gargano, 'Oggi comincia Olocausto. Anzi, continua', *Il Mattino* (20 May 1979): 1. Similar references were also made in the American press, see Shandler 1999: 165.

127 'Il razzista è sempre pronto.'

128 Livi, 'Ebrei'.

riencing from extremist left- and right-wing groups. A front page column in *l'Unità* published on the day of the miniseries' first episode made a clear statement of this perceived equivalence, claiming that, just as the Nazis had targeted Jews and communists, the same anticommunist hatred had given rise to the 'new Nazism' of the Red Brigades.¹²⁹ The same parallel between Nazism and the Red Brigades appeared in *Avvenire* and the monthly *Studi Cattolici* on the opposite side of the political spectrum.¹³⁰ The effectiveness of this association was corroborated by the results of a survey carried out in four schools (two state and two Jewish schools), which showed that the younger generation perceived political violence in Italy at the time as no less intense than that during Nazism.¹³¹

As we see from this example, much of the reflection that *Holocaust* provoked was easily absorbed into ongoing political skirmishes. For the left, the miniseries served as a warning about the consequences of discrimination against cultural and political minorities and about the use of violence in politics.¹³² The conservative *Il Giornale nuovo* and its readership drew parallels between Nazism and Stalinism, the *Lager* and the gulag, thus employing the programme in the service of its anticommunist agenda. The paper also enlarged the focus on victims of the Holocaust to include Italian POWs and victims of Titoist partisan repressions in Yugoslavia.¹³³ *Il Giornale nuovo* and MSI's *Secolo d'Italia* offered readings of the Holocaust that inclined towards extreme forms of universalisation and relativisation. Both papers defined the Holocaust as nothing more than the latest demonstration of what human beings are capable of when discipline is lax. They equated the mass death narrated in *Holocaust* with the slaughter perpetrated by Idi Amin in Uganda, the Soviets' massacre of Polish officers

129 'Nazisti', *l'Unità* (20 May 1979): 1.

130 Cesare Cavalleri, 'Nel teleromanzo "Olocausto" rivivono gli orrori antisemiti', *Avvenire* (22 May 1979): 5; Marinelli 1979.

131 Goren, 'Olocausto'.

132 Cesario, 'Discutere'; Fabre, 'Cronache'.

133 Cattaneo, 'Rifiutarsi'; 'La parola ai lettori: altri olocausti', *Il Giornale Nuovo* (31 May 1979): 23; 'La parola ai lettori: altrettanti olocausti', *Il Giornale Nuovo* (5 June 1979): 21.

in Katyń, the martyrdom of early Christians in ancient Rome, the British government's treatment of the Irish during the Great Famine, the slaughter of Christians during the Arab invasions, of Arabs during the Crusades, of Armenians by the Turks, and the murder of Ustasha, Chetnik, Petainist and fascist collaborators after the Second World War.¹³⁴ That this universalist approach did not help readers to understand the distinct past narrated in *Holocaust* is clearly evident from the many letters to the editor published by *Il Giornale nuovo*. Though not statistically reliable, these letters nevertheless provide a snapshot of the newspaper's readership. In the forty days between the miniseries' premiere and the end of June, published letters to the editor compared the Holocaust to Stalinism, China, Vietnam and Cambodia, Russian anti-Semitism, Hiroshima, income taxes, labour law, and even the highway code.¹³⁵

The Catholic press, too, shared this tendency to appropriate the Holocaust as a powerful metaphor for present political needs. The DC newspaper *Il Popolo* kept a low profile in the debate, only once suggesting that *Holocaust* should be seen as a reflection on state sponsored violence.¹³⁶ The Italian bishops' daily newspaper *Avvenire*, on the contrary, completely de-historicised the meaning of the programme, criticising it for failing to extend its message to what they saw as today's version of 'Nazi mentality': abortion.¹³⁷ The same parallel was drawn by *Secolo d'Italia*, which reproduced an article that appeared in the Catholic German monthly *Der Fels*. The piece fantasised that those responsible for the 'genocide of 2.5 million unborn babies' would be brought to justice in a Nuremberg Trial of sorts

134 Frullini, 'Sconvolgente "Olocausto"'; Lodoli, 'Molti "Olocausto"'.
 135 'La parola ai lettori: olocausti da ricordare', *Il Giornale Nuovo* (23 May 1979): 23; 'La parola ai lettori: compiti degli intellettuali', *Il Giornale Nuovo* (25 May 1979): 15; 'La parola ai lettori: per non dimenticare'; 'La parola ai lettori: altri olocausti'; 'La parola ai lettori: contro la libertà', *Il Giornale Nuovo* (31 May 1979): 23.

136 Surchi, 'Quando l'orrore'.
 137 Cesare Cavalleri, '"Olocausto" e le radici di ogni sterminio', *Avvenire* (10 June 1979): 10; Raimondo Manzini, 'Quella resistenza anonima e eroica', *Avvenire* (20 May 1979): 3; Cavalleri, 'Enfasi'.

to be held in 1995 in Berlin.¹³⁸ Such ruminations established a shared view of Nazi crimes between the Catholic official press and the post-fascist right-wing press.

In some countries, the tendency to draw universalising parallels from *Holocaust* was countered by Jewish institutions.¹³⁹ In Italy, no such critique emerged. The substantial absence of a strong Jewish communal presence in the public discussion surrounding *Holocaust* made it possible for commentators to draw the most far-reaching parallels without challenge. Such parallels were also encouraged by the Italian public's profound and widespread lack of understanding of the specificity of the Holocaust. As we have seen, this lack of understanding had deep historical roots, and was in some sense necessary in order for Italians to maintain their perceived status as a victim nation.

The great success and impact of the miniseries in Italy was that the term 'Holocaust' became familiar to all Italians, becoming in a short time the common designation for the destruction of the European Jews.¹⁴⁰ However, in the majority of cases the peculiarities of the Italian discourse on the Holocaust led to responses that only incidentally focused on the events represented, or on Italy's role in them. Such selective remembrance of the Holocaust underscores the narrowness of the limits of Italian debate at the time, and the variety of pressures that were brought to bear on the process of coming to terms with the past. It was only in the second half of the 1980s and the 1990s – that is, in a different political and cultural context – that a wider debate on the Holocaust involving historians and the public took place in Italy, and even then with mixed results.

138 Claus P. Clausen, 'Olocausto 1995', *Secolo d'Italia* (2 June 1979): 3.

139 See on this Wolf 2004: 74.

140 The first two episodes were watched by 18.4 and 19.8 million viewers, see 'Olocausto. Venti milioni domenica lo hanno visto', *Corriere della Sera* (31 May 1979): 28. The following four were watched by 16.6, 20.8, 19.3, and 21 million viewers. The print run of the Italian edition of Green's novel was of around 600,000 copies; see L.T., 'È falso oppure serve?', *La Stampa* (20 June 1979): 3. In the United States, too the miniseries brought the word 'Holocaust' into 'virtual "household" use', see Owen S. Rachleff, 'Assessing *Holocaust*', *Midstream*, 24/6 (June-July 1978), p. 51, quoted in Shandler 1997: 153.

CHAPTER SIX

From the Centrality of the Resistance to that of the Holocaust

This chapter analyses the shift that occurred between the 1980s and 1990s in public discussions about the war which saw the centrality of the Resistance give way to that of the Holocaust. This process peaked in 1997, which I define as the Italian ‘year of the Holocaust.’¹ As with the shifts discussed in previous chapters, this process combined international and domestic factors.

The 1980s witnessed a consolidation of the Holocaust’s centrality in Western memory culture. The post-Cold War dissemination of its memory was characterised by the coexistence of two apparently diverging processes. One was the interpretation of the Holocaust as a unique (and uniquely Jewish) event, and as a privileged vehicle for the construction of contemporary Jewish identity. This particularist pattern was counterbalanced by the rise of the Holocaust as a moral touchstone for societies as a whole. Although exceedingly optimistic in their conclusions, Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider correctly identify in Holocaust memory a measure for universalist and humanitarian identifications in the current age, at least in the West.²

In Italy, the rise of Holocaust memory coincided with a crisis of the role of the Resistance in the foundation of the Republic, a shift marking the most relevant element of discontinuity in public memory of the war. The crisis originated by a wave of historical revisionism, or ‘anti-antifas-

¹ This is how the ABC show *Nightline* dubbed 1993 for the United States. See Cole 2000: 13, 148; Loshitzky 1997: 5; Weissman 2004: 10; Rothberg 2000: 182.

² Levy and Sznaider 2002: 88; Kattago 2009.

cism' as Richard Bosworth has defined it.³ The term 'historical revisionism' indicates a complex set of discourses aimed at doing away with antifascism as the cornerstone of Italian democracy, and at replacing the dichotomy between Fascism and antifascism with the one between totalitarianism and democracy. This shift had its central scholarly point of reference in Renzo De Felice.⁴ De Felice's thesis was that Fascism and Nazism were completely incommensurable phenomena,⁵ thus undermining the category of 'Nazi-Fascism' that had long been hegemonic on the left. In the final years of his life, De Felice defined the collaborationist RSI as a patriotic sacrifice made by Mussolini to mitigate the effects of Nazi invasion.⁶ Moreover, Mussolini's supposedly loose enforcement of the racial laws was in De Felice's view due to the former's attempt to become a reference point for all those countries that feared German supremacy.⁷ Finally, De Felice argued that the Resistance had been carried out by a small number of militants while the vast majority of the population did not take sides.⁸ Revisionist historians claimed that the small number of participants in the Resistance, and its primary debt to a 'non-national' force such as the communists meant that the former could not provide the source of the Republic's legitimacy.⁹

Two important corollaries of the revisionist trend consisted in criticising potentially controversial episodes of the Resistance, especially those involving communists, and in representing Fascism as a popular, modernising, and tolerant regime – except for the persecution of the Jews – leading to what some historians have defined as the de-fascistisation of Fascism.¹⁰

3 Bosworth 1999: 90. See also Ginsborg 2001: 249–84; Luzzatto 2004; Focardi 2005: 56–93; Storch 2007.

4 Santomassimo 2000.

5 De Felice 2001: 53–5.

6 De Felice 1995: 114. See also De Felice 1997: 61–7.

7 De Felice 1995: 159.

8 De Felice 1995: 56.

9 Detti 2002 aptly defined it as 'a posthumous delegitimisation of the left.' As an example of this approach, see Belardelli *et al.* 1999, and some of the critiques it raised in Ruth Ben-Ghiat *et al.* 2001: 405–7.

10 Luzzatto 2004: 74; Gentile 2005: vii.

These revisionist trends legitimised an equivocal paradigm based on indifference towards the two sides at war in Italy, fascists and antifascists, perceived both as victims and perpetrators to an equal degree.¹¹ As a result, while Nazism and Communism were lumped together in public debates as foreign totalitarianisms, Fascism was reinserted in the *longue durée* of Italian history.¹²

The crisis reached the point of no return during the *Tangentopoli* (Bribesville) scandal of the early 1990s.¹³ Within the space of a few years, all historical political parties disappeared, changed name, or became irrelevant.¹⁴ The PCI did away with its communist identity and became the *Partito Democratico della Sinistra* (Democratic Party of the Left, PDS), later *Democratici di Sinistra* (DS), and now *Partito Democratico* (PD).¹⁵ The leftist minority of the PCI founded the *Partito della Rifondazione Comunista* (Communist Refoundation Party, PRC). The Catholic party DC split into a number of smaller political factions,¹⁶ while the Socialist party simply melted under the pressures of investigations,¹⁷ and its cadres migrated to either the centre-left or the centre-right coalitions. In the mid-1990s, the neo-fascist MSI changed its name to *Alleanza Nazionale* (National Alliance, AN) and condemned Fascism's anti-Semitic laws and its role in the Holocaust.¹⁸ New political forces became prominent, including

11 Clifford 2008: 132–4; De Luna 2000.

12 Focardi (forthcoming).

13 See on this Bufacchi and Burgess 1998; Foot 2003; Pasquino 2000: 80–94.

14 For a general analysis of Italy's long transition from the First to the so-called Second Republic, see *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 2003, entirely dedicated to this subject. See also, on AN's redefined identity, the different evaluations offered by Tarchi 2003: 150–1, and Bosworth 1999: 96–8.

15 See Ignazi 1992; Bull 1996; Kertzer 1996.

16 See Furlong 1996.

17 Gundle 1996.

18 See Tarchi 2003; Ruzza and Schmidtke 1996. AN's leader Gianfranco Fini in 1994 defined Mussolini as 'the greatest statesman of the century'; see Ginsborg 2001: 297. However, AN condemned every form of anti-Semitism 'even when it is camouflaged with the propaganda of anti-Zionism and anti-Israeli polemics'; see Tarchi 2003: 150.

Silvio Berlusconi's *Forza Italia* (FI) and the *Lega Nord* (Northern League).¹⁹ Established narratives about the Second World War, Fascism, and the Resistance dissolved in this political turmoil, and historical revisionism found a receptive environment.

As noted, this dramatic shift was contemporary with an increasingly central presence of the Holocaust in public memory. The complex ways in which the Holocaust moved from being relatively peripheral to becoming the defining Italian memory of the conflict is the subject of this chapter and of the conclusion. The complexity of the subject is due to the fact that it simultaneously involves scholarly research and overt simplifications, genuine testimonies and political manipulations, intense documentaries and sugar-coated afternoon talk-shows, all interconnected to create diverse strands of memory, sometimes overlapping and often diverging. The point of departure is that, in recent years, participation in the persecution and destruction of the Jews in Italy has become the only fascist crime to be unanimously acknowledged and commemorated. As a result, the Holocaust has become the locus of attempts to construct a shared notion of Italian nationhood, doing away with explicit calls for ideological watersheds (the Fascism/antifascism split) while at the same time retaining the 'good Italian' self-acquitting stereotype. An important example of this trend, the reception of and debate surrounding the story of Giorgio Perlasca, is discussed in the final chapter.

However, the rise in Holocaust consciousness combined with the declining centrality of the Resistance narrative, has also led to a broader variety of voices participating in the debate.²⁰ The devaluation of antifascism and the push for the construction of a self-acquitting narrative in relation to the events of the Holocaust, were in part counterbalanced by another paradigmatic shift, occasioned by two conferences organised by the Italian Parliament in 1987 and 1988. These focused on the complete abrogation of the racial laws, and on a comparative study of anti-Semitic persecutions

19 McCarthy 1996; Porro and Russo 2001. On the Northern League, see Diamanti 1996.

20 Marcus 2005; Marcus 2007: 18–19.

in Europe.²¹ While these works did not emerge from a vacuum, and other books on the same issues had preceded them or were released around the same time,²² their effect was to represent a symbolic turning point, in which the Italian state officially promoted initiatives that aimed to sensitise the general public to the persecution of the Jews in Italy. Furthermore, the proceedings of these two conventions contained *in nuce* the seeds of much of the research that would be conducted during the 1990s.²³ The different phases of the persecution, deportation, and destruction of the Italian Jews have been the object of in-depth analysis since the 1990s,²⁴ and knowledge about the Holocaust and its victims in Italy has been systematised and contextualised.²⁵

These works stressed how fascist persecution of the Jews was a complex process that could not be simply defined as a mere side effect of the ideological evolution of fascist foreign policy, but also drew upon specifically Italian themes. Until then, the racial laws had often been seen as a cynical, but essentially alien, by-product of the alliance with Nazi Germany, and for this reason were understood to have been rejected by Italians at large.²⁶ The subtext was that the laws had not really been implemented in

21 Toscano 1988; *La legislazione antiebraica in Italia e in Europa. Atti del convegno nel cinquantenario delle leggi razziali, Rome, 17–18 October 1988* 1989. These two institutional books can be integrated with Caffaz 1988.

22 As examples: Coen 1988. The full body of fascist anti-Semitic legislation was reproduced in *La rassegna mensile di Israel* 1988; Bravo and Jalla 1986; two works dedicated to Italian concentration camps were Casali 1987, and Capogreco 1987.

23 Galimi 2002: 587.

24 A starting point is represented by the works progressively refined by Michele Sarfatti. See Sarfatti 2000; Sarfatti 1997; Sarfatti 1994. The most complete bibliographical repertoire is Cavarocchi and Minerbi 1999. A more recent but synthetic bibliography can be found in Nani 2003. See Ventura 1997; Finzi 1997; Fabre 1998; Levi Fabio 1998. For a more general approach, see Levi 1991. For a critical approach to part of this literature, see Cavaglion 2006: 47–54.

25 Picciotto 2002; Picciotto Fargion 1994. Mayda 2002; Rodogno 2003; Ribaldi 1994.

26 This thesis was strongly advocated by De Felice 1993: 258, but had been already codified in memoirs and studies published in the first decades of Republican Italy.

full, or their impact was mitigated by the populace's instinctive civil disobedience. In fact, the racial laws were enforced and diligently followed by Italian authorities far more than previously thought. It would be naïve to think that this historical knowledge resulting from more thorough research simply 'trickled down' to the general public. But the opposite claim, that it remained confined to the ivory tower of professional historians, would also be a vast generalisation. Cultural products such as TV programmes and films, and the debates generated by them, often served as mediators and conveyors of part of this knowledge to the public – along with other messages.

Television in the 1980s

The heightened interest in Holocaust stories is testified by a number of miniseries produced by RAI in the 1980s. The first was entitled *Storia d'amore e d'amicizia* (Story of Love and Friendship, Franco Rossi) and aired on Rete 1 in six episodes between 24 October and 28 November 1982.²⁷ It is the story, sprawling between 1935 and 1943, of Davide Sonnino and Cesare Costantini, two poor ragmen and promising boxers living in the popular district of *Trastevere* in Rome. Davide is a Jew, Cesare is the son of an antifascist. They both fall in love with Rina, a neighbour who is also Jewish. Rina eventually chooses to marry Davide. Neither the brief rivalry between the two young men, nor the much more enduring persecutions resulting from Fascism, harm their friendship. The first to suffer is Cesare, who is forced to abandon the world of boxing for his political inclinations. He is later sent in political exile for two years and is reduced to resuming his precarious life selling rags once he returns to Rome. In the meantime Davide, who has become national champion, is stripped of his title with the passing of the racial laws, and banned from attending his gym. After a

27 The mini-series is based on Spoletini 1985.

series of humiliating jobs, Davide emigrates to America, but he returns to Rome in 1941. The three are still struggling to make ends meet when news of the collapse of the regime reach them in July 1943. Cesare resumes political activity, while Davide begins to traffic smuggled goods. Having narrowly escaped deportation in the big roundup of 16 October 1943, Davide, Rina and their two children find sanctuary in an Augustine monastery, but are forced to flee. When their new hiding place is discovered by the Germans, Davide sacrifices himself to save his family.

The miniseries offers an interesting snapshot of the place of the Holocaust in Italian public memory of the war. The persecution of the Jews was presented as distinct but on a par with that of antifascists. As Marcus has noted, with this miniseries, the Holocaust 'found its way into the forefront of popular historical consciousness.'²⁸ *Storia d'amore e d'amicizia* was successful and has enjoyed several reruns. In it, viewers received fairly detailed information about the persecutions, the roundup, as well as the deportation. As in *Loro di Roma*, *Storia d'amore e d'amicizia* dramatises different generations' responses to persecution. While Davide and Rina plan to migrate to the US, or hide outside the ghetto to avoid deportation, Rina's pious father Settimio commends himself to an ultimately defeatist eschatological perspective. The difference between Davide in *Storia d'amore e d'amicizia* and David in *Loro di Roma* is that the protagonist in Lizzani's film does not flee, but embraces the Resistance. In the miniseries, that politically conscious choice is made by Cesare. It is he who, not having a family to protect, devotes himself to the public cause of liberation. It is still Cesare who, with his political insights, provides vital advice to Davide and Rina. In the early 1980s, before the crisis of the Resistance narrative, it is legitimate to believe that, if the characters' names have a meaning, the twice affirmed Roman-ness of Cesare Costantini signals the authors' preference between the two forms of commitment: private (Davide) and public (Cesare).

While showing the inhumanity of fascist persecutions, the miniseries also stresses ordinary Italians' distance from the regime. This approach is

28 Marcus 2007: 65.

summed up by Davide's cry, out of amusement and relief, that two Austrian deserters (presumably Catholics) he meets in the monastery are 'just like the Italians' in their rejection of war. The monastery scene also pays homage to the many acts of rescue conducted by religious institutions in Rome, as well as post-Second Vatican Council inter-religious dialogue, as when the prior welcomes the Jewish family saying that they were sent by their common Father.

That a more open approach to the discussion of the Holocaust in Italy was compensated by an equal emphasis on non-Jewish rescue and help is clear from the analysis of two other programmes. The first was a panel discussion that asked the meaning of *Essere ebrei in Italia oggi* (Being Jews in Italy Today, Rete 3, 30 April 1983, 20.30). Exactly ten years after the programme of almost the same title referenced in Chapter Four, all the guests (Primo Levi, Jewish intellectual Guido Lopez, Renzo De Felice, and President of the Jewish Community of Milan Giorgio Sacerdoti) reiterated the view that Italians were tolerant and exempt from charges of anti-Semitism. The only difference from the previous programme was that the emphasis was now more on tolerance, humanity, and sacrifice than on the Resistance.

The other example was represented by *Il coraggio e la pietà: Gli ebrei e l'Italia durante la Guerra 1940-1945* (The Courage and the Pity: The Jews and Italy during the 1940-1945 War, RAI DUE, 9 and 16 November 1986, 21.30).²⁹ The programme presented itself as a counterpoint to Marcel Ophüls' 1971 documentary *Le chagrin et la pitié*. While the French documentary exposed the misdeeds of Vichy's government and highlighted French collaboration, *Il coraggio e la pietà* was constructed around the idea that 'Italians during the war were immune from anti-Semitism'.³⁰ The programme drew heavily on Renzo De Felice's interpretation of anti-Semitic persecutions and the Holocaust. Thus, the 1938 persecution was seen solely as the outcome of the alliance with Germany and as marking the first and

irrecoverable crack in the support enjoyed by Fascism.³¹ According to the documentary, the population's response was 'typically Italian': instead of openly protesting, they conducted myriad acts of solidarity. Moreover, the deportations were conducted by the Germans, while the RSI was little more than a reluctant and subordinate collaborator. Instead, Italians, many of them fascists, rescued Jews.

This narrative was reinforced in the second instalment of the documentary, dedicated to the conduct of the Italian army in the territories occupied during the war (parts of France, Yugoslavia, and Greece). There, diplomats and officials protected thousands of Jews residing in those territories and refused to hand them over for deportation. This behaviour was largely motivated by political and economic interests, to which humanitarian rescue was subordinated.³² When not convenient, Italian occupying forces denied entry to thousands other Jews, condemning them to their fate. None of these themes is to be found in *Il coraggio e la pietà*, according to which Italy behaved better than any other country during the war. Instead, the programme suggested that Italians deprecated themselves too much and had a tendency to forget that had all other countries behaved as Italy did, there would not have been a Holocaust (the programme obviously failed to mention that Italy was Germany's main ally, and that had all countries behaved as it did, there would have been no one left to fight them). One of the first TV programmes entirely dedicated to the Holocaust in Italy congratulated itself on the fact that 'Italian bureaucracy has inimitable means to waste time, and it is comforting to acknowledge that this irritating characteristic was used for a good cause',³³ thus reversing a widespread negative stereotype into a reassuring self-representation. The transcripts of the documentary were collected in a book published alongside the broadcast.³⁴ The volume was also translated into English and for many years remained one of the few works on the Holocaust in Italy available

29 The programme has re-run several times; see Ciusa 1994: 202.

30 Caracciolo 1986: 17. This volume collects the transcripts of the interviews in the documentary.

31 De Felice 1993: 309.

32 Rodogno 2003: 480.

33 Caracciolo 1986: 18.

34 Caracciolo 1986.

to English-speaking readers.³⁵ In his foreword to the volume, Renzo De Felice summed up the thesis by writing that Italians gave as much help as they could to Jews, both in Italy and in the occupied territories, and they did so out of pure Christian spirit.³⁶

What is striking in the programme is not only its selective and self-serving use of testimonies, but also its absolute lack of contextualisation. Viewers are given precious little information on the officers' possible motives for such a conduct, which is only explained in terms of obedience to a presumed deep-seated cultural code. It must be said, however, that preconceived ideas about a supposed inbuilt Italian humanitarianism had a long history, and could even make their way into important and pioneering works by scholars such as Leon Poliakov, Susan Zuccotti, Jonathan Steinberg, and Hannah Arendt.³⁷

There were other possible ways to tell that story. For this reason, it is worthwhile considering a documentary on the same subject, made the next year, in 1987, by American filmmaker Joseph Rochlitz. *The Righteous Enemy*³⁸ explores the protection granted to Jews by the Italian army in the occupied territories. Through interviews with survivors (among them the director's own father) and retired diplomats, the documentary gives due credit to the Italian institutions involved in the rescue operations. It reconstructs their collaboration with underground rescue networks as well as acknowledging soldiers' and diplomats' resistance to pressures from the German ally and local authorities to deport the Jews under their jurisdiction. In other words, it is a positive portrait of Italy made by a son

35 Caracciolo 1995.

36 De Felice 1986: 9.

37 'The Italian troops did everything to show their sympathy for the Jews', Poliakov and Sabille 1955: 157; Italians protected Italian and non-Italian Jews in the occupied territories thanks to 'their common humanity', Zuccotti 1996: 76; the diplomats who helped Jews are described as conspirators who disobeyed Mussolini's orders out of humanity by Steinberg 1990: 3; the rescue of Jews in Italy and in the occupied territories was the 'outcome of the almost automatic general humanity of an old and civilized people' according to Arendt 1963: 161.

38 *The Righteous Enemy*, 1987 [documentary] Directed by Joseph Rochlitz. USA: Parstel. Available at: <<http://www.vimeo.com/2196024>> [Consulted October 2009].

of a survivor. What is interesting is the fact that RAI bought the rights for broadcasting the documentary twice, in 1988 for five years and 1996 for a further three, but never aired it. Moreover, RAI expressed interest in the work a third time in 2002, but only for a heavily edited version focussing exclusively on the filmmaker's father survival and rescue, thus cutting down all references to the broader context. Rochlitz rejected the 'offer.' In 2004, the President of the Republic Ciampi made a public appeal to RAI to broadcast the documentary. RAI approached Rochlitz for the fourth time, proposing to air *The Righteous Enemy* at 8.30 AM. The director once again rejected the proposal.³⁹

To this day, the documentary has not been aired. Since there is no archival evidence available to help explain the documentary's vicissitudes, various speculations suggest themselves. Perhaps, lack of strategic planning and poor coordination among decisional centres played a role. However, the persistent contradictions in RAI's conduct indicate a more serious problem. *The Righteous Enemy* had one major flaw in the eyes of RAI executives: it did not offer a one-sided account. Thus, while celebrating the rescue of Italian and non-Italian Jews, it also referenced the fact that hundreds, if not thousands, of Slovenes were starved to death in Italian-run camps, as well as acknowledging that while high rank officers, such as General Roatta, greatly helped Jews, they were at the same time responsible for war crimes against the local population in the former Yugoslavia. Moreover, the documentary's historical consultant Menahem Shelah did not refrain from explaining the conduct of the Italian army as being motivated not only by humanitarian reasons, but also by calculations about possible postwar scenarios, once defeat loomed, already in 1942.

The combined analysis of these two works indicates the limits of what could and could not be said on television, even at the inception of the new, supposedly more open, discourse on the Holocaust. The reverse of the 'good Italian' image is that everything that would challenge this stereotype is prevented from reaching the public. In 1989 RAI bought the rights for the BBC documentary *Fascist Legacy* (Ken Kirby) on war

39 Rochlitz 2009.

crimes committed by Italians in Ethiopia, Yugoslavia, and Greece, and never aired it.⁴⁰ In 2005, it declined funding for the documentary on war crimes perpetrated in Greece *La Guerra sporca di Mussolini* (Mussolini's Dirty War, Giovanni Donfrancesco). The documentary was broadcast in 2008 by History Channel.⁴¹ Discussing the Holocaust in Italy was perfectly acceptable, as long as the myth of the 'good Italian' was not challenged, or even problematised. The films analysed in this chapter were received within this broad context of heightened but selective memory. Proof of the real interest in the theme is that an extensive discussion of the number of films and TV programmes circulating in Italy since the 1980s would require a separate study. For this reason, the chapter will focus on a selection of products whose reception highlight themes that are significant in the context of this book.

Gli occhiali d'oro and Jona che visse nella balena

The introduction of the racial laws in 1938 is the subject of *Gli occhiali d'oro* (The Gold Rimmed Glasses, Giuliano Montaldo, 1987). Based on the novel by Giorgio Bassani published in 1958,⁴² the film draws a parallel between the persecution and segregation of the young Jewish student David Lattes, and that of the gay physician Dr Fadigati in Ferrara in 1938 – a theme also developed more recently in Ferzan Ozpetek's *La finestra di fronte* (Facing Windows, 2003).⁴³ As recalled in some reviews of the film, Bassani's novel had sparked a great deal of controversy when first published, mainly because of its explicit sexual references.⁴⁴ In a different context, the theme of 'racial'

40 On this point see Focardi 2005: 90.

41 See Arosio 2008.

42 Bassani 1998b.

43 See the detailed discussion of the film in Marcus 2007: 140–52.

44 Tullio Kezich, 'Gli occhiali di Noiret la tragedia di un uomo', *la Repubblica* (5 September 1987): 25–6.

persecution received just as much attention as that of sexual discrimination, and the two forms of persecution mirrored one another.⁴⁵

Gli occhiali d'oro was read by *l'Unità* as a reflection on a universal tragedy,⁴⁶ an indictment against discrimination and 'bourgeois intolerance' in the present.⁴⁷ The analogy between the two forms of persecution was criticised for its lack of subtlety by *Avanti!*'s Lino Micciché, who took the film to task for trivialising the story into a didactic tale that simplified the ambiguities of the literary text, for example misrepresenting the quiet but relentless discrimination and isolation of the Jews and transforming it into a noisy outburst of vulgar rage.⁴⁸ Besides these few notes, reviews did not go further in their discussion of the film, and paid little attention to two characters introduced in the film and not present in the literary text – Nora, David Lattes' fiancée who decides to convert to Catholicism and marries a fascist official, and Professor Perugia, a Jewish lecturer forced to resign, who sets up a private study group in which he introduces students to antifascist values.

A quite different reception welcomed Roberto Faenza's *Jona che visse nella balena*. The film is a fairly accurate screen adaptation of the Dutch survivor Jona Oberski's memoir *Kinderjaren*.⁴⁹ It is the story of the Holocaust seen through the eyes of a child between the age of four and seven (the memoir covers the years between 1942 and 1945). Jona and his parents, deported from Amsterdam in 1943 and sent to Bergen Belsen, belonged

45 Sauro Borelli, 'Con gli occhiali della memoria', *l'Unità* (5 September 1987): 15.

46 Borelli, 'Con gli occhiali'.

47 Michele Anselmi, 'Montaldo: i miei ebrei come Sacco e Vanzetti', *l'Unità* (4 September 1987): 16. Although with different nuances, similar interpretations of the film can be found in the conservatives *il Resto del Carlino*, and *Il Tempo*; see Vittorio Spiga, 'Vittime della propria diversità', *il Resto del Carlino* (5 September 1987): 7, and Gian Luigi Rondi, in *Il Tempo* (27 September 1987), now in Rondi 1998: 685.

48 Lino Micciché, 'La letteratura tradita dal cinema', *Avanti!* (5 September 1987): 14; Natalia Aspesi, 'Ma l'autore Bassani assolve il regista', *la Repubblica* (6–7 September 1987): 23; Mino Argentieri, 'Quella estate del '38', *Rinascita*, 44/40 (17 October 1987): 20; Sergio Surchi, 'Deludono questi Occhiali d'oro', *Il Popolo* (5 September 1987): 9.

49 Oberski 1983.

to a 'privileged' minority of Jews who possessed a Visa for Palestine, and were kept as a means of exchange for German POWs. These Jews were not immediately sent to the death camps and exterminated. Rather, they could keep their clothing and had access to relatively better food rations. However, these minor advantages did not spare Jona's parents' lives.

The film represents a good test case for the analysis of Holocaust debates in the early 1990s. In particular, a theme that emerged from its reception was that of the so-called limits of representation. The representation of the camps through the eyes of a child was widely hailed by reviewers. Jona does not fully understand what happens in the camp, and tries to decipher it from his own limited point of view.⁵⁰ With him, words like Jew or Nazi do not have any meaning. He 'understands' only elementary notions like the shouts of the guards, the barbed wire fence, or his mother's protective hands.⁵¹

The director Faenza explained that this approach was purposely chosen to let the violence of the camp unfold before viewers just as it did for Jona.⁵² Writing in *Repubblica*, the journalist Roberto Nepoti argued that the choice to represent the Holocaust through the eyes of a child was a powerful way to unveil the event's intrinsic incomprehensibility.⁵³ The idea that the Holocaust lay beyond the grasp of understanding represented a shift. A further example of this change is the claim made in 1993 by the author of *Kapò*, Gillo Pontecorvo, that the Holocaust cannot be put on screen.⁵⁴ While in previous decades the destruction of the European Jews had been often construed as one of the many acts of Nazi barbarity (countered by the

50 See Morando Morandini, 'Un bambino all'inferno: l'infanzia nel lager', *Il Giorno* (2 April 1993): 18.

51 See Paola Tavella, 'Infanzia a Bergen Belsen', *il manifesto* (26 March 1993): 14; Enzo Natta, 'Il piccolo Jona illumina le tenebre del lager', *Famiglia Cristiana*, 33 (18–25 August 1993): 150.

52 In Detassis 1993: 74.

53 Roberto Nepoti, 'Il piccolo ebreo a Bergen-Belsen', *la Repubblica* (4 April 1993): 32.

54 Michele Anselmi, 'L'infanzia di Jona "la mia vita nel lager"', *l'Unità* (2 April 1993): 21; Mirella Poggialini, "'Non odiare nessuno, mai'", *Avvenire* (11 April 1993): 21; Roberto Faenza referenced in Manzato 1993: 645.

Resistance), it now appeared as a moral standalone symbol. The Resistance narrative was replaced by the rise of the Holocaust as a distinct event.

This view of the Holocaust, as being beyond the limits of representation and historically specific, could well coexist with its universalisation. The emphasis in the film, as in the memoir, on the importance of family bonds struck a chord with the Catholic press. *Famiglia Cristiana* defined *Jona che visse nella balena* a celebration of love and a painful recollection of family life.⁵⁵ *Avvenire* was more upfront, claiming that *Jona che visse nella balena* was not another Holocaust film, but one celebrating the family, thus universalising the film's 'message' for its readership.⁵⁶

Another form of universalisation highlighted current issues, in particular the war in Yugoslavia.⁵⁷ Marcus has recently noted that universalising interpretations also marked the broadcast of the film on RAI. Streaming written queries about the persistence of racial hatred in the present dotted the narrative, questioning viewers about the relevance of the film's episodes to the contemporary world.⁵⁸ These premises help frame the many explicitly universal readings of the film marking its reception. Following an established approach to Holocaust films in Italy, Faenza claimed that his film resonated beyond the Holocaust, holding a universal and contemporary meaning.⁵⁹

Thus, the picture we have of Italian discussions on Holocaust films in 1993 (the so-called American 'year of the Holocaust'), shows the coexistence of different moral, cultural and political priorities and understandings. On the one hand there was the need to remember the Holocaust as the historically specific tragedy of European Jews. In this sense, *Jona che visse nella balena* was welcomed by *L'Espresso* and *Ciak* as a reminder of an event (the Holocaust) and a prejudice (anti-Semitism) that still haunted Italians

55 Natta, 'Piccolo Jona'.

56 Poggialini, "'Non odiare nessuno, mai'".

57 Lietta Tornabuoni, "'L'Olocausto è vivo, ci appartiene'", *La Stampa* (23 April 1993): 25. See also Mosca 1993: 83; Natta, 'Piccolo Jona'.

58 Marcus 2007: 19.

59 Maurizio Di Rienzo, "'L'autore vince il dramma'", *Il Giornale* (4 April 1993): 16; Tornabuoni, "'Olocausto'".

and Europeans.⁶⁰ According to this interpretation, the film was about the present because of resurgent anti-Semitism, and it could be historically related to the fiftieth anniversary of the Warsaw ghetto uprising.⁶¹ On the other hand, it was perceived as conveying universal human values. The most immediate point of reference in those cases was the war in Yugoslavia, thus validating Levy and Sznajder's claim that Holocaust memory has developed a temporal duality, according to which the Holocaust is particular (i.e. uniquely Jewish) in relation to the past, and universal for the present and the future, and that the 'either-or' perspective that dominated the first phase of the domestication of the Holocaust (in the Italian context almost always in favour of a universalist take) has been replaced by 'as well as' options that reconfigure the relationship between particularism and universalism.⁶² In the reception of *Jona che visse nella balena*, this is made explicit by the fact that these two approaches could dwell within the same article.⁶³ At the same time the reception of the film shows the penetration in Italy of discourses on the 'limits of representation.' Still, with no advocates as influential and authoritative as Elie Wiesel in the United States or Claude Lanzmann in France, with most of the literature produced in the field unavailable in translation to Italian readers, and most importantly without a strong social subject to push this agenda forward, this potentially very charged subject was simply taken on board in Italian debates without raising significant controversy.

60 Enzo Siciliano, 'Bambino, ricordi quel lager nazista?', *L'Espresso*, 39/11 (April 1993): 199; see the interview with Tullia Zevi in Nuara 1993b, and that with Arrigo Levi in Nuara 1993c; Nuara 1993a.

61 See Mosca 1993: 81.

62 Levy and Sznajder 2002: 96, 101; Levy and Sznajder 2006: 8.

63 As in the case of Mosca 1993.

La vita è bella

It took a few more years for the limits of representation to become part and parcel of Italian discussions on Holocaust films. The debate kicked off only when these themes merged with strong domestic issues. This happened with *La vita è bella*. In the case of Benigni's film, issues of morality, culture, history, aesthetics, and party politics combined together to engender its peculiar Italian reception.

The film is the story of Guido Orefice, a carefree Jew in 1930s Italy, who courts and eventually marries an 'Aryan' schoolteacher named Dora. The couple and their son Giosuè live happily despite the persecution initiated by the fascist regime in 1938. During the German occupation of Italy, the family is deported. In an attempt to spare Giosuè the horrors of the camp, Guido imagines that the whole Holocaust is a game of hide-and-seek played with the Nazis, and that the first prize is a life-size tank. The film ends with Guido's death as he attempts to find Dora during the evacuation of the camp. Giosuè and Dora survive the Holocaust. Thanks to Guido's wit and love, Giosuè's innocence and childhood are preserved.

It is an established tradition in the Italian film market to release potential box office hits in the weeks around Christmas. For this reason, *La vita è bella* went on general release on 20 December 1997, although selected screenings started from 11 December. With a budget of about \$ 9 million and a substantial advertising campaign, the release became an event in its own right covered by almost every national newspaper – and thus posing the preconditions for the film's immediate success.

Giacomo Lichtner has aptly noted that it is difficult to evaluate the debate generated by the film.⁶⁴ *La vita è bella* has generated portentous discussions, in Italy and abroad, among scholars as well as in popular culture.⁶⁵ The film's astonishing success both at the box office and in festivals,

64 Lichtner 2008: 206.

65 See at least Viano 1999; Ben-Ghiat 2001b; Kertész 2001; Flanzbaum 2001; DeKoven Ezrahi 2001; Haskins 2001; Siporin 2002; Gilman 2000; Picart and Perrine 2004;

culminating with three Academy Awards in 1999, further contributed to fuel debate, and served to crystalise two opposing fields. Oversimplifying matters, on the one hand were those who saw *La vita è bella* as a bowdlerised, sugar-coated, manipulative, and inherently trivial misrepresentation of the Holocaust. This position gained currency among scholars, highbrow film critics, and many second generation Jews, wary about the power of popular films to misrepresent the event in its magnitude. On the other hand were most of the press and the public, lowbrow commentators, and survivors. The main bone of contention lay in *La vita è bella*'s use of comedy and fairy-tale to tell a story of persecution and deportation. In the following pages, I will limit myself to a discussion of the Italian debate, and will reference works and opinions expressed elsewhere only when they entered the debate in the *Belpaese*.

The representation of the Holocaust by means of comedy was not an entirely new phenomenon. As discussed elsewhere in this book, Terrence Des Pres had already argued in favour of the use of comic registers, arguing that laughter is a life-reclaiming form of resistance to brutality and Fascism, and that the representation of the Holocaust by means of comedy could prevent viewers from desensitisation.⁶⁶ A somewhat different approach was adopted by Sander Gilman. Displaying a bias for realism not uncommon in discussions of Holocaust films, Gilman criticised Benigni's film for conveying the misplaced illusion that purposeful action could have saved children in the camps, while in reality this was a matter of pure chance.⁶⁷ Some of these themes were also debated in the Italian reception of *La vita è bella*, thus linking it to the broader international reflections engendered by the film.

The film was subject to similar highbrow disapproval in Italy. Despite Benigni's attempt to forestall criticism by declaring that *La vita è bella* did

not aim at realism,⁶⁸ the film's comedic form was attacked by left-wing intellectual Goffredo Fofi and literary scholar Carlo Ossola. Their Adornian argument was that no fable about the Holocaust could replace naked history, and that a film like *La vita è bella* was a sign of fading memory.⁶⁹ The film's co-screenwriter Vincenzo Cerami replied that history and art have different statuses and that artistic representations of the Holocaust must be disloyal to its reality.⁷⁰ Hilene Flanzbaum provided a defence of Cerami's stance. She suggested leaving aside categories such as 'truth' 'verisimilitude' and 'reality' in our evaluations, and praising works such as *La vita è bella*, which 'compel viewers ... to take another look ... at the event.' In her view, the quest for verisimilitude is 'severely limiting fresh discussion, and ... runs the risk of keeping a wider public audience from coming to terms

68 Maria Pia Fusco, 'Benigni. Orco nazista attento. Charlot è tornato', *la Repubblica* (12 December 1997): 44. See also Valerio Cappelli, 'Benigni: i reduci di Auschwitz mi hanno detto grazie', *Corriere della Sera* (12 December 1997): 35; Simonetta Robiony, "'Far ridere con la tragedia'", *La Stampa* (12 December 1997): 29; Giacomo Vallati, 'Benigni, si ride da piangere', *Avvenire* (12 December 1997): 25; Cristiana Paternò, 'Un poeta nel lager', *l'Unità* (12 December 1997): 7; Paolo Scotti, 'Ma adesso Benigni fa piangere', *Il Giornale* (12 December 1997): 19; Cristina Piccino, 'Il Roberto innamorato', *il manifesto* (12 December 1997): 25; Leonardo Jattarelli, 'Benigni: io, contro l'orrore con la poesia', *Il Messaggero* (12 December 1997): 23; Beatrice Bertuccioli, 'La vita è bella. Basta ci sia Benigni', *il Resto del Carlino* (12 December 1997): 27; and Beatrice Bertuccioli, 'Che ridere. Anzi: che poesia', *il Resto del Carlino* (12 December 1997): 27; Vanina Pezzetti, 'E' stato come toccare Abramo', *l'Unità* (17 December 1997): 3.

69 Carlo Ossola, 'L'enigma di Benigni. Se Pronunci il Mio Nome ...', *Il Sole 24 Ore* Sunday Supplement (1 February) CD-Rom 'Venticinque anni di idee'. Milan: Il Sole 24 Ore; Goffredo Fofi, "'La vita è bella" è brutto', *Panorama* 35/1 (1998): 47; Goffredo Fofi, 'La vita è una furbata', *Panorama* 35/2 (1998): 65. See also Rosetta Loy, 'Un giullare nel sacrario del secolo. La favola audace di Benigni', *L'Indice dei libri del mese* 15/3 (1998): 43; Nico Orengo, 'La favola a premi di Benigni cancella il ricordo del male', *La Stampa*, Tuttolibri supplement (5 February 1998): 2. Carlo Ossola, 'Ma il vostro film occulta la realtà', *La Stampa*, Tuttolibri supplement (12 February 1998): 6.

70 Vincenzo Cerami, 'Entriamo nei lager con gli occhi di oggi', *La Stampa*, Tuttolibri supplement (12 February 1998): 6. See also Curzio Maltese, 'La bottega artigiana di Benigni. La storia', *la Repubblica* (19 March 1999): 1.

Marcus 2002; Loshitzky 2004; and the essays on *Life Is Beautiful* contained in Russo Bullaro 2005.

66 Des Pres 1988: 220–2.

67 Gilman 2000: 304.

with the event. ... When critics scoff and sneer at these attempts and then link them to denial, they ... take a step toward erasing the topic from the larger cultural agenda.⁷¹

The charge of Holocaust denial noticed by Flanzbaum reached Italy early on, when *Le Monde* defined *La vita è bella* as 'négationniste'.⁷² The right-wing editor of *Il Foglio* Giuliano Ferrara persistently condemned the film's supposed trivialization of the Holocaust. On several occasions he likened the film to the Broadway version of *The Diary of Anne Frank* for their common representation of the victims as expunged of their Jewishness and for their banalised message of naïve faith in humanity.⁷³

During the circa eighteen months of debates on *La vita è bella*, *Il Foglio* published dozens of excerpts from negative articles published in the United States.⁷⁴ The newspaper also reproduced a cartoon by Art Spiegelman that originally appeared in *The New Yorker* criticising the film.⁷⁵ Spiegelman was interviewed by *Corriere della Sera*, where he defined films such as *La vita è bella* and *Schindler's List* (Steven Spielberg, 1993) as relativisations of the 'central traumatic event of our century'.⁷⁶ Similar remarks were made by historian Enzo Traverso, who lamented what he saw as the film's

71 Flanzbaum 2001: 285–6.

72 References to *Le Monde*'s article are present in 'Le Monde stronca Benigni. Replica: siamo felici', *Corriere della Sera* (9 January 1998): 37; Michele Anselmi, "Le Monde" stronca Benigni: "negazionista". Cerami replica "gli ebrei l'hanno amato", *l'Unità* (9 January 1998): 7; Giuseppe Salza, 'Le Monde critica Benigni? Ma in Francia nessuno l'ha visto', *il manifesto* (10 January 1998): 22; and 'Lettere', *Il Foglio* (10 January 1998): 4.

73 Giuliano Ferrara, 'Olocaustoshow', *Panorama*, 35/3 (22 January 1998): 30–3; Giuliano Ferrara, 'Ora la vita è un pò meno bella', *Panorama*, 36/11 (18 March 1999): 29. Similar remarks were also made in Rossi 1999.

74 As an example, see 'La Auschwitz comica di Bob Benigni massacrata in America', *Il Foglio* (18 November 1998): 3. Film scholar Maurizio Viano has defined these critiques as 'moral indignation', see Viano 1999: 157.

75 See *Il Foglio* (16 March 1999), p. 1.

76 Ranieri Polese, 'Spiegelman, Una vignetta per non dimenticare', *Corriere della Sera* (30 March 1999): 35. See also 'Attacco a Benigni: "nega l'Olocausto". Una matita al veleno', *la Repubblica* (10 March 1999): 41.

displacement of the actual event in favour of a sanitised 'Holocaust' that privileged emotional stimulation over critical understanding.⁷⁷ The lengthy debate engendered by the film also saw shifts in the opinions expressed by some commentators, for example Tullia Zevi. Zevi initially expressed great appreciation for the film, stressing its importance for 'keeping the conscience of the young generations awake'.⁷⁸ However, a year later she feared that fairytales might whitewash and relativise the horror and 'turn the unacceptable into the acceptable'.⁷⁹

Continuities and discontinuities

Criticism of *La vita è bella* in regard of the limits of representation involved mainly two groups of commentators. The first were intellectuals and scholars skeptical about mass culture's ability to confront an event like the Holocaust. The second group was composed of right-wing commentators like Ferrara, whose charges of 'trivialisation' against the film were in large part politically motivated. In fact, the Italian reception of *La vita è bella*, especially in its first few months, was heavily influenced by the left-right political divide.⁸⁰ At the time, Italy was governed by the centre-left *Ulivo* (Olive Tree) coalition headed by PM Romano Prodi, and Benigni was an outspoken supporter of the left. In the hyper-politicised Italian context, criticising *La vita è bella* and its director functioned as a way of attacking the government.

Thus, *La vita è bella* was defined by the right as proof of leftist *buonismo* (an obsessive search for mediations among diverging positions and

77 Traverso 1999: 19. In more scathing terms, the same critique was also raised in Fofi 1998b: 92–3.

78 Marco Molendini, 'Benigni, fuochi d'artificio', *Il Messaggero* (9 January 1998): 19.

79 "Un piccolo grande genio". I commenti', *la Repubblica* (10 February 1999): 8.

80 See on this Della Pergola 1999.

exceedingly benevolent behaviour).⁸¹ Once again, Ferrara led the argument, criticising the film for exploiting the Holocaust ‘just to make money and *buonismo*.’⁸² The implications of the political debate about Benigni’s work went deeper. A number of the issues at stake were summed up by an article published by *Il Giornale*, which affirmed that *La vita è bella* was a regime film, ruthlessly fuelling resentment among Italians. *Il Giornale* also attacked *La vita è bella* for ‘mocking Italian – as opposed to fascist – imperial rhetoric’ and for its ‘easy’ condemnation of fascist anti-Semitism, made now that ‘even contemporary fascists would send yesterday’s Nazis to the concentration camps.’⁸³ In other words, the article displays some of the ambiguities of the Italian revisionism described earlier in this chapter, reading the film as a political attack on the right and its memory. The article acknowledged the inhumanity of the racial laws, although it deflected the real responsibility towards the Nazis. However, with a logic that can only be understood through the lens of the contemporary political climate, it also criticised preserving the memory of those crimes and of the war that liberated Italy from Nazism and Fascism as an unnecessary source of resentment and division among Italians.

There was another and less immediate inhibition of memory at work in *La vita è bella*, referring to Benigni’s use of his father’s experience as a POW in Germany as a source of legitimisation for his Holocaust story. As noted by Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *La vita è bella* and the debate it engendered offer an insight into the selective public memory of Italy’s position as a German ally and an anti-Semitic state during the Second World War.⁸⁴ This repression paved the way for a widespread culture of victimhood that encouraged the perpetuation of the *italiani brava gente* stereotype and the

81 Scotti, ‘Ma adesso Benigni’: 19; Alfonso Berardinelli, ‘Benigni? La nuova estetica di sinistra ha fatto splash’, *Corriere della Sera* (7 January 1998): 25.

82 Marco Neirotti, ‘Per Benigni recensione a rate’, *La Stampa* (3 January 1998): 20. The ultimately uplifting tone of the film was occasionally also criticised on the left; see Filippo La Porta, ‘Posso parlare un pò male di Benigni?’, *l’Unità* (7 January 1998): 1–2.

83 Maurizio Cabona, ‘Nel lager delle ovvietà’, *Il Giornale* (20 December 1997): 18.

84 Ben-Ghiat 2001b: 256.

firm downplaying of any indigenous components in fascist anti-Semitism. Among the effects of the absolute predominance of narratives of victimhood, Ben-Ghiat highlights the lack of attention towards the Italian Jewish victims of the Holocaust and the silencing of the story of Italian POWs. The POWs were too painful a reminder of the regime and its defeat to have a place in public memory. This public silence was counterbalanced by the proliferation of stories told inside the households. Ben-Ghiat reads Benigni’s transfiguration of his father’s figure as a demonstration of this latter phenomenon. Having survived the Nazi camps as a POW, his figure shifted from Axis soldier to victim of Nazism, to inspirational source for the story of a Jewish victim, so performing ‘another kind of evasion of reality.’⁸⁵

Fearing this amnesia, Holocaust survivor and writer Edith Bruck criticised the film for ridiculing laws that she believed were unknown to viewers, and for depicting the ‘fascist era without Fascism’, a critique also shared by an article published by *Avvenire*.⁸⁶ Although the attacks on *La vita è bella* probably misfired, these critiques highlight a dangerous whitewashing of history that characterised large portions of the film’s media reception, as in *la Repubblica* columnist Vittorio Zucconi’s front page remark that ‘*La vita è bella* embodies ... the Italy that helped the Jews during the war in the occupied zones [and] in the Italian cities themselves.’⁸⁷

However, it must be stressed that these omissions and simplifications were not just an extension of those described in previous chapters. The Holocaust was not ‘simply’ absorbed into broader national narratives like the Resistance, or universalised. Much of the debate in the press was dedicated to the specific conditions of Jewish persecution in the camps.⁸⁸ Jewish survivors participated in the debate as never before, legitimising or

85 Ben-Ghiat 2001b: 259.

86 Edith Bruck, ‘L’inverosimile favola del lager di Benigni’, *l’Unità* (18 January 1998): 1, 8; Massimo Bernardini, ‘Benigni: Giobbe e i lager’, *Avvenire* (17 December 1997): 22.

87 Vittorio Zucconi, ‘E negli USA è già cult’, *la Repubblica* (10 February 1999): 1.

88 Bruck, ‘Inverosimile favola’; Robiony, ‘Far ridere con la tragedia’; Valeria Gandus, ‘Auschwitz e Benigni, i retroscena mai raccontati’, *Panorama*, 34/50 (18 December

undermining the film's historical 'realism' with their testimonies.⁸⁹ Unlike in the past, the Holocaust as such held now a central place, as opposed to being a metaphor for something else. Moreover, the debate on whether the character of Guido was an appropriate representation of Italian Jews was not as marginal as in the past. Guido's 'weak' Jewish identity raised limited criticism. Given the high assimilation and rate of inter-confessional marriage since unification,⁹⁰ life for many secular Jews was to some extent seemingly alike to that of non-Jews. Thus, Benigni's choice to represent a character not strongly characterised in cultural terms was interpreted by the historian Giovanni De Luna as a not-inaccurate representation of a section of Italian Jewry in the 1940s.⁹¹

In other words, in the late 1990s there was an unprecedented degree of attention to the Jewish specificity of the Holocaust. The growing centrality of the Holocaust as a Jewish event in the *La vita è bella* debate was the result of a progressive process of distancing from earlier forms of understanding. A parallel development can be traced regarding the Resistance narrative. An article in *Repubblica* noted that Guido resisted the Holocaust by not acknowledging it.⁹² The literary scholar Alberto Asor Rosa in *l'Unità* defined Guido's struggle to preserve Giosuè's life as an act of Resistance *per*

1997): 82–4; C.A., 'Benigni, abbraccio degli ebrei', *La Stampa* (16 December 1997): 28.

89 See Luisella Mortara Ottolenghi (Chair of CDEC) in Anna Benedettini, 'Benigni tra gli ex deportati', *la Repubblica* (16 December 1997): 45; Marina Morpurgo, 'L'abbraccio della comunità di Milano', *l'Unità* (17 December 1997): 3. See also Auschwitz survivor Liliana Bucci's defence of the film's 'historical realism' in Barbara Palombelli, 'La bambina di Auschwitz', *la Repubblica* (4 April 1999): 31.

90 See Sarfatti 2000: 4–5.

91 De Luna 1999: 24–5. See also Bar-on 2005: 189; Siporin 2002: 346; Benigni's interview in Celli 2001: 151. However, for a critique of Guido's "weak" Jewish identity, see Cavaglion 1998a: 43.

92 Irene Bignardi, 'Con l'anima di Charlot Benigni fa il miracolo', *la Repubblica* (18 December 1998): 45.

se,⁹³ while film scholar Enrico Ghezzi defined Guido's coping strategies as 'class struggle, a revolt against mental extermination'.⁹⁴

These readings of the film, all offered on the left, point to a progressive slippage of the idiom of Resistance that exemplifies a paradigm shift. While in previous decades the Holocaust had been understood as part of the 'anti-Nazi-fascist' struggle (and its victims were assimilated to the martyrs of antifascist Resistance), in the late 1990s it was the Resistance that was redefined and adapted to Jewish strategies of survival. The inherent political nature of the Resistance was downplayed in favour of a 'weak,' less charged use of the term resistance.⁹⁵ Deprived of its traditional political meanings, the notion of Resistance thus acquired a universal humanitarian value, allowing viewers of potentially all political areas to identify with Holocaust victims.

However, while positing the Holocaust at the centre of a shared collective memory, a position the political Resistance never managed to achieve in so politicised a country as Italy, this use of the Holocaust did not go completely uncontested on the left. Traverso criticised *La vita è bella* for failing to inquire into the causes of the Holocaust and its connections to the present, and for not exploring Italian cultural and historical responsibilities. Moreover, he criticised the general trend of acknowledging Jewish subjectivity only at the price of a complete de-politicisation of historical conscience. Antifascism was replaced by a more universal and innocuous humanitarian spirit, in which all persons are potentially able to empathise with the victims.⁹⁶

93 Alberto Asor Rosa, 'Questo film di Benigni è un gran film', *l'Unità* (18 December 1997): 9.

94 Enrico Ghezzi, 'La lotta di classe in una sala di cinema', *la Repubblica* (13 January 1998): 15.

95 Millicent Marcus has drawn an analogy between a scene in *Kapò* where an inmate refuses to translate Nazi orders to the other inmates thus rejecting her mediating position between Nazi power and the audience, and Guido's "translation" of the camp rules. However, the difference between the two episodes is that while the prisoner in *Kapò* is a political deportee and her act of defiance is part of her political resistance, Guido is motivated by the love for his son. See Marcus 2000: 160.

96 See Traverso 1999.

Thus, the debate on *La vita è bella* showed that acknowledging the Holocaust was entirely possible. This public discussion simultaneously emphasised both discontinuity and continuity with the past. The film's huge impact in the media helped situate Holocaust themes at the centre of memory culture. *La vita è bella* represented the single most important contribution to the construction of a new memory of the Holocaust at the end of the decade. However, acknowledging Italian responsibilities was a different matter. Thus, the continuity was represented by the fact that, taken as a whole, the debate on the film refrained from exploring Italian guilt analytically (despite this theme not being ignored in the film).⁹⁷

The reception in the Catholic press

The claim that most commentators received *La vita è bella* as a Holocaust film must be qualified. In fact, the majority of the Catholic press appropriated and relativised it in ways consistent with established canons of interpretation. Thus, while there was hardly any comment in the Catholic press that was less than enthusiastic about the film, the rationale for this enthusiasm did not lie in its Holocaust content. Rather, the positions expressed revolved in the main around two themes dear to the Church: affirmation of life and familial love. For Vatican Radio the film was an 'ode to life',⁹⁸ in turn *Avvenire* defined it a work 'intrinsically religious, because dominated by Mercy'.⁹⁹ A reader of the Italian bishops' newspaper saw the film as containing the story of a 'model family' embodying all the truly important values:

97 Some reviews noted these themes, especially the mockery of Fascism. According to the cinema journal *Cineforum*, *La vita è bella* pokes fun at the regime by showing its bureaucratic stupidity; see Chiacchiari 1997.

98 Giuseppina Manin, 'Scalfaro e D'Alema: onore per l'Italia. Radio Vaticana: ha esaltato la vita', *Corriere della Sera* (23 March 1999): 8.

99 Massimo Bernardini, 'Guarda che ti combina quel guitto di Benigni', *Avvenire* (17 December 1997): 1, 16.

love, loyalty, sacrifice.¹⁰⁰ An extremely relativising (but, as demonstrated by the previous chapter, hardly new) example of this reading was represented by the public screening organised by the anti-abortion movement at the peak of the film's success to discuss the issues of parenthood, family, and life as a gift. In this mode *La vita è bella* was seen to reaffirm the message of Christmas: love surmounts every obstacle.¹⁰¹

These relativising appropriations of the Holocaust were not as widespread as in the past. The majority of the press saw *La vita è bella* as a Holocaust film. Indeed by the late 1990s this reading was little contested, and the Holocaust had become the object of a vast amount of attention in the press.

La tregua

La vita è bella represented the climax of this process, but it was not the only work directed by an Italian filmmaker released in 1997 and targeted for worldwide distribution. In the 'Italian year of the Holocaust' there was another film (among other minor ones whose subject was more or less directly Holocaust-related)¹⁰²: Francesco Rosi's *La tregua* ('The Truce').

The film is the screen adaptation of Primo Levi's memoir reconstructing the long and tortuous journey back from Auschwitz to his native Turin,¹⁰³ and seeks to capture the mixture of tragedy and epic of the literary text.

100 'Lettere al direttore: a proposito di Benigni', *Avvenire* (26 March 1999): 26.

101 Claudio Siniscalchi, 'La vita è bella', *Il Popolo* (3 January 1998), p. 11. See also Claudio Ragaini, 'La vita, comunque', *Famiglia Cristiana*, 70/16 (23 April 2000), <<http://www.stpauls.it/fc00/0016fc/0016fc50.htm>> [consulted October 2009].

102 I refer to the thriller *La terza luna* ('The Third Moon', Matteo Belinelli), and to *L'ultimo bersaglio* ('Last Target', Andrea Frezza). In both films, the Holocaust looms large and is the backdrop for actions set in the present.

103 Primo Levi 1997i. The English first edition was *The Truce. A Survivor's Journey Home from Auschwitz* (London: Bodley Head, 1965).

Released on the tenth anniversary of Levi's death and starring John Turturro in the leading role, *La tregua* benefited from an extensive promotional campaign. The film premiered on 11 February 1997 in Turin. The event, attended by the city's elite,¹⁰⁴ was preceded earlier that day by a conference on Primo Levi.¹⁰⁵ However, despite presenting the hallmark of potential success, the final result did not live up to expectations, and *La tregua* was debated notably less widely than *La vita è bella*.

The reception centred on the film's treatment of the close link between memory and writing in Levi's life.¹⁰⁶ With over fifty years of distance from the events and thirty-five from the literary source, the discussion focussed on Rosi's departure from the text. One theme debated was the place of religion and Jewish identity in the film. *La tregua* contains a sequence in which Primo Levi comments 'there is Auschwitz, therefore there cannot be a God.' These words were not contained in the literary source, but Levi had uttered them in an interview given to Ferdinando Camon in 1986.¹⁰⁷ According to *Il Popolo*, Levi's 'discovery' that there was no God in and after Auschwitz made survival only bearable through oblivion.¹⁰⁸ In other words, according to *Il Popolo*, Levi found life without God unbearable. This reading is twice extraordinary, firstly because it ignores the fact that Levi had never been religious in his life – as shown in the scene where he rejects the idea that his survival was God's will (also based on an interview but not present in the literary source).¹⁰⁹ Secondly, it misreads the film's

104 Maurizio Porro, 'Rosi: "la mia Tregua vuol solo commuovere"', *Corriere della Sera* (12 February 1997): 34.

105 See Cesare Medail, '"Ma il lager lo perseguitò nei sogni"', *Corriere della Sera* (11 February 1997): 33; Giorgio Straniero, 'Levi, la memoria', *Avvenire* (11 February 1997): 18.

106 Fabio Ferzetti, 'Corale, picaresco, tragicomico: cronaca di un ritorno alla vita', *Il Messaggero* (7 February 1997): 20. For two opposing assessments, see Francesco Pascarito, 'Dall'orrore del lager a quello della memoria', *Il Popolo* (20 February 1997): 10, and Goffredo Fofi, 'Primo Levi, dimmi tu se questo è un film', *Panorama*, 34/8 (27 February 1997): 184.

107 Camon 2006: 72.

108 Paolo Pinto, 'All'inferno e ritorno', *Il Popolo* (13 February 1997): 10.

109 Camon 2006: 72; Levi 1997h: 1054.

appeal to witnessing and remembering as a call to oblivion.¹¹⁰ However, *Il Popolo*'s attention to the religious theme was not entirely devoid of rationale. Levi's relationship with religion played a much bigger role in the film than in the book, and reviews took on board these themes, debating the writings of Wiesel and Hans Jonas alongside the film.¹¹¹

Related to this is the theme of Levi's Jewishness, and in particular that of Jewish identity among non-Jews. The film introduces two important scenes, freely adapted from the novel. The first sequence is set in Krakow's crowded and improvised market. Levi and his fellow travellers are trying to interact with Polish peasants, through the help of a local lawyer who speaks French and German. Levi soon realises that the man introduces him as a political prisoner rather than as a Jew. When questioned over the motives for his selective translation, the lawyer replies that it is for their own good, as 'la guerre n'est pas finie' and Jews are still unwelcome in Poland. Instead of feeling 'suddenly old, lifeless, tired beyond human measure',¹¹² Levi's response in the film is a bold affirmation of Jewish identity. The scene received mixed responses. Some interpreted it as an effective historical exemplification of the hardships endured by Jews even in postwar Europe,¹¹³ or as an appeal to contemporary viewers to reject their prejudices.¹¹⁴ Others saw this sequence as didactic, rhetorical and a total departure from Levi's tone.¹¹⁵

Even more debated, and an even stronger departure from Levi's text, was the second scene reviewers picked up on. This is set at the Munich train station, where the train on its way to Italy stops for some time. In the literary text, Levi wrote that he felt Germans should have listened to

110 On the importance of the act of looking in the film, see Marcus 2002: 258.

111 Morando Morandini, 'C'è Auschwitz quindi non può esserci Dio', *Il Giorno* (12 February 1997): 17. See also Fabio Ferzetti, 'Una "Tregua" per rinascere', *Il Messaggero* (11 February 1997): 23; Cappabianca 1997: 191; Bolzoni 1997: 39.

112 Levi 1997i: 245.

113 Bruno 1997: 188.

114 Bolzoni 1997: 39.

115 Genovese 1997: 74.

what he had to say, but they were ‘deaf, blind, and mute.’¹¹⁶ In the film, on the contrary, a German soldier, who is working nearby, stops and bows begging forgiveness to Levi – who is still wearing the yellow badge – as soon as he sees him. Rosi defined the sequence as a tribute to Holocaust consciousness in present-day Germany and to Willy Brandt’s gesture at the Warsaw ghetto monument, as an acknowledgement of memory’s ability to modify people’s beliefs.¹¹⁷ As with the previous example, reviewers responded in a variety of ways, seeing it as the emotional climax of the film on the one hand,¹¹⁸ or as simplistic and didactic on the other.¹¹⁹ Fernaldo Di Giammatteo’s explanation of the scene was a disenchanted reminder that films are first and foremost industrial products. He pointed out that *La tregua* was produced with Italian, French, German, Swiss, and British financing. As a result of this fairly common productive structure, the film delivered an ‘ecumenical’ message appealing to diverse European audiences (including Germans, as also noted by Morando Morandini).¹²⁰

Independent of its specific value, Di Giammatteo’s critique highlights a tension between the need to adhere to the historical truth of the Holocaust and its immediate aftermath on the one hand, and the ongoing process of construction of a ‘shared’ European memory of the event on the other. With its intentional betrayals of its literary source, *La tregua* embodies this still unresolved contradiction. As such, the film signals a transition, and it is likely no coincidence that the two critics who sneered at the acknowledge-

116 Levi 1997i: 393.

117 Porro, ‘Rosi’; Michele Anselmi, “‘La tregua’ aspetta i giovani”, *l’Unità* 2 (12 February 1997): 6; Irene Bignardi, ‘Il lungo cammino verso le coscienze’, *la Repubblica* (11 February 1997): 43; Beatrice Bertuccioli, ‘Rosi commuove con “La tregua”, *il Resto del Carlino* (12 February 1997): 20.

118 Tullio Kezich, ‘1945, fuga da Auschwitz. Rosi racconta Levi’, *Corriere della Sera* (11 February 1997): 33; Enzo Natta, ‘Dall’incontro di Rosi e Levi nasce una grande “Tregua”’, *Famiglia Cristiana*, 67/10 (5 March 1997): 106; Scandaletti 1997.

119 Genovese 1997: 74; Lietta Tornabuoni, ‘Il lungo viaggio dall’inferno a casa’, *La Stampa* (11 February 1997): 24; see also David Rooney, ‘The Truce’, *Variety* (24 February – 2 March 1997): 114.

120 Di Giammatteo 1997: 34. See also Morando Morandini, “‘La tregua’ di Francesco Rosi”, *Il Giorno* (15 February 1997): 17.

ment of German ‘coming to terms with the past’ belonged to the generation born in the 1920s.

However, while pointing towards a European memory of the Holocaust, *La tregua* is also very much focused on the notion of *italianità*. Italy is the *Heimat* in which Levi can fully restore the humanity of which he had been deprived in the camp. In his journey, Levi tries to recreate substitutes for home, bonding with a motley crew of fellow countrymen.¹²¹ Although some of these characters’ traits come from Levi’s vivid prose, the film nonetheless draws heavily upon the repertoire of the *commedia all’italiana* genre, presenting age-old Venetian, Milanese, Roman, and Sicilian regional stereotypes and tics. Although Marcus also sees this use of comedy as the parody of the film’s general epic tone present in the contrast between Levi’s elevated written language and Cesare’s use of Roman dialect, the vast majority of reviewers saw this choice by Rosi as deeply inappropriate to the subject matter.¹²²

Marcus’ analysis illuminates a further tension in the film. *La tregua* is imbued with nostalgia for the Soviet utopia, the foundational myth for Rosi and much of the ideology for his generation. The film bids farewell to that utopia – retrieving it in the symbol of the Soviet locomotive driving the survivors to their destination and in the chaotic but deeply humane Soviet characters – and ushers in a new post-ideological era in the treatment of the Holocaust. *La tregua* represents the end of decades of Italian cinema during which Holocaust stories were presented and received as mere signifiers for an ever-other political significance, and opened up the discussion of the Holocaust in its own terms. As Marcus aptly put it, ‘*La tregua* looks back to a period of left-right oppositional thought which allowed no room for the story of Italy’s Jews, while simultaneously looking forward to the dissolution of Cold War ideology and the telling of the suppressed history that will emerge full-fledged in the outpouring of films to follow.’¹²³

121 Marcus 2002: 263–5.

122 Marcus 2002: 348; Anselmi, “‘Tregua’”; Bignardi, ‘Lungo cammino’; Fofi, ‘Primo Levi’; Morandini, “‘Tregua’”; Ferzetti, “‘Tregua’”; Bruno 1997: 188; Genovese 1997: 74; Vanelli 1997: 75.

123 Marcus 2007: 80–1.

Memoria

The debates engendered by *La vita è bella* and *La tregua* show clear signs of a growing public interest in the Holocaust. However, the quantity of Holocaust discussion was not matched by a quality of public reflection on the Italian involvement in the Holocaust. The documentary *Memoria* contributed towards filling this lacuna. *Memoria – I sopravvissuti raccontano* is entirely centred on the victims. Directed by Ruggero Gabbai and first screened at the 1997 Berlin Film Festival (only days before *La tregua*'s premiere), *Memoria* is the 84 minute-long product of 256 hours of footage of interviews of 93 Italian Jewish survivors of the Holocaust.¹²⁴ Led by the survivors' own testimonies, the film follows a chronological structure, from the beginning of the persecutions to Auschwitz. Covering a large variety of Italian Holocaust experiences, the film was shot in Milan, Rome, Florence, Genoa, Venice, Trieste and the Risiera di San Sabba camp, and Auschwitz.

Gabbai and the film's historical advisor Marcello Pezzetti of the CDEC stressed how the project began as a reaction to Steven Spielberg's Shoah Foundation's decision to put Italy at the bottom of the list of countries to cover in their effort of mapping the (whole) European Jewish experience of the Holocaust.¹²⁵ Fearing that many survivors would have passed away by the time Spielberg's project reached Italian shores, they took upon themselves the task of preserving the distinctive Holocaust memory of an, until recently, often overlooked Jewish community.¹²⁶

Interviews in *Memoria* are quite different in style from those conducted by the Shoah Foundation, as survivors do not sit in an interview room, but are taken to the places being discussed – a narrative strategy famously

124 See Maurizio Porro, 'Berlino scoprirà la Schindler's List degli italiani', *Corriere della Sera* (7 February 1997): 37.

125 Porro, 'Berlino'; Valeria Gandus, 'I sopravvissuti ricordano: questo fu il vero Olocausto', *Panorama*, 34/8 (27 February 1997): 136–7.

126 On the scant attention received by Italian Jews in Holocaust narrative and historiography, see Zimmerman 2005: 1.

put in practice by Claude Lanzmann in *Shoah* (1985).¹²⁷ For many of these survivors it was their first journey to Auschwitz since the end of the war, and some of them had never publicly borne witness to their ordeal before.¹²⁸

The peculiarity of *Memoria* and its reception was that it dealt directly with Italian involvement in the Holocaust and with the difficult process of integrating this atrocity into national popular consciousness. *Memoria* was an exhortation to remember to a country too often oblivious of its share of responsibility in the Holocaust. Pezzetti stated quite bluntly that Italy had no consciousness of this aspect of the Holocaust, and that many survivors still felt the scar caused by the indifference of 'average Italians' before, during, and after this tragedy.¹²⁹ Furthermore, Gabbai emphasised the fact that since 1945 even the left had ignored this episode, and that this led many survivors to remain silent about their experience.¹³⁰ For this reason both in the film and in interviews, the authors stressed that Jews were not different from non-Jewish Italians,¹³¹ a view made explicit by Pezzetti's remark that the witnesses 'were Jews, but were first of all *Italians*'.¹³² Reclaiming the Italian-ness of the victims had been a staple of Holocaust debates since the immediate postwar. However, while in the immediate postwar period the priority was to establish a continuity between the suffering of persecuted Jews and that of other Italians, in the Holocaust-conscious latter-1990s the focus was on finally acknowledging that Italians were not simply victims, but also persecutors of other Italians. As Gabbai stressed in an interview, the Italian Holocaust was a story of ordinary Italians arrested by other ordinary Italians and sent to the gas chambers by ordinary Germans.¹³³

127 Silvio Danese, "I sopravvissuti hanno accettato di tornare con noi ad Auschwitz", *Il Giorno* (20 February 1997): 25.

128 Alberto Crespi, 'Schindler's List italiana', *l'Unità* 2 (6 February 1997): 3.

129 Porro, 'Berlino'.

130 Maria Pia Fusco, 'Viaggio nei luoghi dello sterminio', *Corriere della Sera* (10 February 1997): 29.

131 Fusco, 'Viaggio'.

132 Marcello Pezzetti in Crespi, 'Schindler's List'.

133 Ruggero Gabbai in Crespi, 'Schindler's List'.

Reacting to the film, *il manifesto* and *l'Unità* were the most vocal in noting how the Holocaust in Italy was 'an Italian thing.' *Il manifesto* highlighted the collaboration of Italian authorities in carrying out the persecution, arrests, and deportation of Italian Jews,¹³⁴ while *l'Unità* focused more on the distorted constructions of 'collective memory' around the deportation of more than eight thousand Jews from Italy and Rhodes, which were too often seen as tragedies not related to Fascism and Italy.¹³⁵ This view was backed up by Pezzetti, who defined the 'meaning' of the film as the fact that Italy mutilated itself and then erased the memory of this mutilation, and suggested that the vast majority of 'ordinary' Italians in the present would not even know that Italy promulgated anti-Semitic laws,¹³⁶ blinded by the harmful myth of the 'good Italian.'¹³⁷

An article in the newspaper *la Repubblica* expressed the hope that the film would be seen by as many viewers as possible, and that it should be broadcast by RAI in prime-time and followed by a debate in studio.¹³⁸ Contrary to what had happened in the past, for example with the unfortunate airing of *Shoah* in a dubbed version late at night on the least popular RAI channel,¹³⁹ *Memoria* was swiftly broadcast on prime-time (further contributing to the Italian year of the Holocaust).¹⁴⁰ The film aired on RAI DUE on 16 April at 20.30 and was unanimously praised by the press as a 'small

134 Alberto Catacchio, 'Italiani a Auschwitz. Un documentario', *il manifesto* (6 February 1997): 26.

135 Crespi, 'Schindler's List'.

136 Marcello Pezzetti in Crespi, 'Schindler's List'.

137 Paolo Soldini, 'I sopravvissuti di Auschwitz turbano Berlino', *l'Unità* 2 (21 February 1997): 7.

138 Fusco, 'Viaggio'; Silvia Giacomoni, 'Ma Auschwitz non è un romanzo', *la Repubblica* (9 March 1997): 40.

139 See Lichtner 2008: 181–2.

140 Further proof of the relevance of Holocaust discussions in 1997 is the TV special conducted by the journalist Gad Lerner on the tenth anniversary of Primo Levi's death. The program was broadcast on RAI 1 on 3 April from 23:30 to 0:30, and gathered one million viewers (12.7% share), see Giuseppina Manin, 'Olocausto in tv: tutti vogliono sapere', *Corriere della Sera* (5 May 1997): 30.

masterpiece',¹⁴¹ 'more impressive than *Holocaust* and as intense as *Schindler's List*'.¹⁴² According to Auditel (the TV-rating measurement agency), it was watched by nearly five million viewers (a 15 per cent share).¹⁴³

Much of the attention devoted by the press to the event was taken up by the controversy raised by the film's positioning in RAI DUE's schedule. *Memoria* was immediately followed by the nonsense show *Macao*, which in turn ended with a long reflection of Mons. Clemente Riva (head of the Italian Bishops' Conference's office for Jewish-Catholic relations).¹⁴⁴ Many, especially the *Corriere della Sera* TV critic Aldo Grasso criticised the evening's 'senseless' mixture of gripping survivor testimonies and light entertainment.¹⁴⁵ However, no one remarked on the fact that a Catholic Bishop was given the opportunity to have the final word on an evening centred around a documentary on the Holocaust in Italy.

The broadcast of *Schindler's List*

The final element of the 'Italian year of the Holocaust' was the TV event constructed around the broadcast of *Schindler's List* on 5 May 1997 (Holocaust Remembrance Day in Israel). What is remarkable about this occasion was the fact that, for the first time, Italian television created a

141 Claudio Sorgi, 'Ad Auschwitz coi "protagonisti"', *Avvenire* (18 April 1997): 20.

142 Aldo Grasso, 'L'orrore di Auschwitz dalla parte degli italiani', *Corriere della Sera* (16 April 1997): 31.

143 Manin, 'Olocausto'.

144 Emilia Costantini, 'Rai Due non censura Bene, ma rimedia col vescovo', *Corriere della Sera* (17 April 1997): 3.

145 Katia Ippaso, 'La bufera su Freccero per Macao e Carmelo Bene. "Fondamentalisti, li conosco. Che mi licenzino pure"', *l'Unità* (17 April 1997): 11; Aldo Grasso, 'Sacro e profano mescolati nell'insensatezza', *Corriere della Sera* (17 April 1997): 3; Alessandra Comazzi, 'Dotte riflessioni sull'Olocausto. Provocazione è: darle dopo Macao', *La Stampa* (18 April 1997): 31.

Holocaust-centred TV event. From early in the morning until late at night, the whole programming of RAI UNO revolved around the Holocaust, with in-studio debates and the rerun of *L'oro di Roma*.¹⁴⁶ According to Auditel ratings, the broadcast of *Schindler's List* (which aired without commercial breaks) was watched by 12,294,000 viewers (50.75 per cent, one of the highest ratings for films since 1987), while the introductory debate hosted by Gad Lerner gathered nearly 11 million viewers (40.05 per cent), and the documentary *Survivors of the Holocaust* (directed by Allan Holzman and produced in 1996 by Steven Spielberg's Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation) that followed the film was watched by more than three million viewers (38.91 per cent).¹⁴⁷ A breakdown of ratings indicated that the film was watched by 6 million women and 5 million men, with 55 per cent of viewers residing in the North of the country, with a medium-to-high level of education and earnings.¹⁴⁸ The demographic analysis showed that the film was watched by 800,000 children between the ages of 4 and 14, that the majority of pensioners and widows watched other programmes instead. It also revealed that *Schindler's List* was watched by 62.79 per cent of teenagers between 14 and 18, and that the majority of viewers were aged between 15 and 34.¹⁴⁹ Although ratings cannot give any indication of the actual process of reception, and their accuracy is subject to healthy doses of scepticism,¹⁵⁰ they still suggest that, in this case, viewers of the film were more likely than not to possess some degree of mediated knowledge of its subject-matter, while viewers who might have had a first-hand experience of the war, or with little education and socio-economic mobility, chose other programmes. In this sense, this data confirm *Schindler's List's* status as an iconic Holocaust representation for the age cohort of the non-witnesses.

146 Manin, 'Olocausto'.

147 All these figures are taken from Simonetta Robiony, "'Schindler's List' per 12 milioni", *La Stampa* (7 May 1997): 26.

148 Alessandra Rota, 'L'Olocausto in Tv ferma l'Italia', *la Repubblica* (7 May 1997): 8.

149 Rota, 'Olocausto'; Silvia Fumarola, "'Un paese migliore di come è descritto'", *la Repubblica* (7 May 1997): 8.

150 See Kansteiner 2006: 143–4.

This data prompted the Chair of RAI Enzo Siciliano (in charge during the left-centre *Ulivo* government) to claim that Italy was 'better than it was usually described'¹⁵¹ and popular Jewish TV anchor Gad Lerner to state that he 'felt proud of belonging to a country that understood it was participating in a collective event.'¹⁵² This idea was further explicated by Aldo Grasso's emphasis on the fact that the Catholic RAI UNO was commemorating the Holocaust Remembrance Day in synchronicity with Jerusalem.¹⁵³

The hyperbolic idea that watching *Schindler's List* was, in itself, an experience able to make someone a better person was not new. Oprah Winfrey had made precisely such an observation when the film was released in the United States.¹⁵⁴ This rather naïve line of reasoning also applied to Italians: it was implied that they were a better people because the majority of them watched the film. The full range of issues at stake was expressed by the journalist and PDS MP Furio Colombo. He simplistically defined the success of the event as the 'reawakening of the people of memory.'¹⁵⁵ In his view, this people belonged neither to the left nor to the right, but consisted of all those willing to look at the heart of darkness of the twentieth century. *Schindler's List* played a key role because, simply by watching it, 'we were all victims [...] but precisely for this reason we will not be enemies for ever.'¹⁵⁶ Colombo saw two equally strong winds blowing in opposite directions: one was revisionism, and the other was leant force by those who wanted to come to terms with the past. He also added that the Fascism-antifascism divide was counterproductive in confronting the Holocaust, since it froze memories into divisions that prevented them from becoming shared values.¹⁵⁷

151 Fumarola, "'Paese'"; Maria Novella Oppo, 'I giovani "scoprono" l'Olocausto in tv. Record d'ascolti per *Schindler's List*', *l'Unità* (7 May 1997): 8.

152 Robiony, "'Schindler's List'".

153 Aldo Grasso, 'Per la prima volta la Rai ha creato un evento', *Corriere della Sera* (6 May 1997): 15.

154 See Horowitz 1997: 119.

155 Furio Colombo, 'Il nuovo popolo della memoria', *la Repubblica* (7 May 1997): 11.

156 Colombo, 'Nuovo popolo'.

157 Federico De Melis, 'L'Italia di Schindler', *il manifesto* (8 May 1997): 20–1.

To sum up, the Holocaust progressively advanced to the centre of public memory of the Second World War in Italy between the 1980s and 1990s. This was the defining trait that marked a discontinuity with the past. However, the number of Holocaust discussions circulating did not bring about a thorough investigation of Italy's historical responsibilities. At the turn of the century, the conflict of memories in the Italian context was not so much one between memory and oblivion, as suggested by Colombo, but between two notions of 'shared' Holocaust remembrance. One condemns Fascism and takes on board Italian guilt, another selectively exculpates the regime, and Italians as a whole. This chapter shows that not only politically motivated revisionist claims are to be held accountable. Deep-seated myths can be found across the political board. Fully investigating Italian responsibility in the Holocaust represents a great opportunity for the country to do justice not only to the victims, but also to its own memory.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Postwar Debates on the Vatican during the Holocaust

This chapter is a diversion from the chronological order followed so far. Discussions of the role played by the Vatican during the Holocaust have a history of their own, which benefits from separate analysis. This task is facilitated by the debates engendered by three cultural products: Rolf Hochhuth's play *Der Stellvertreter* (The Deputy, 1963), and the films *Rappresaglia*, and *Amen*. (Costa-Gavras, 2002). The analysis of how these works were discussed upon release offers a vantage point for understanding the shifts in Italian public debates on the delicate issue of the 'silences of Pius XII.' As with the rest of the book, the main focus of the chapter aims less to discuss the extensive and complex body of scholarly historical research, than to address the treatment of the subject-matter in more popular media. The rationale for this choice is that, as noted by Michele Sarfatti, in Italy more than elsewhere issues involving the Vatican automatically hold a national and political value.¹ Moreover, as Anna Foa and Agostino Giovagnoli have pointed out, discussions of Pius XII's response to the Holocaust in mainstream media are often characterised by their political use,² and have been influenced more by shifting cultural attitudes than by archival findings.³

The debates analysed in this chapter corroborate those claims. Different political and cultural contexts did indeed result in remarkably different approaches to the theme. In the 1960s and 1970s, when the Holocaust was not yet a central feature of public memory, Pius XII was criticised (mainly

1 Alessandra Baduel, 'Michele Sarfatti: "ci vorrebbe la scomunica per i rei di delitti razziali"', *l'Unità* (16 March 1998): 9.

2 Foa 2005: 320.

3 Giovagnoli 2008: xv.

by the communist left) for his anticommunism, and his silence during the Holocaust was interpreted and criticised as a political choice favouring Nazism over Communism. In the reception of *Amen*, the issue of anticommunism, without any political force to promote it after the demise of the PCI, moved to the background, and was replaced by the critique of anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic prejudices in the Catholic Church.

While criticisms of Pius XII's conduct shifted, the response of the Catholic institutional press did not change significantly over the years. They argued persistently that Pius XII did everything in his power to help Jews during the Holocaust, that a more explicit critique of Nazi policy would have been detrimental for the victims themselves, and that many survivors publicly expressed their gratitude to the Church. However, the reception of the three works highlights an ongoing debate among Catholics regarding the burden of the past. The next few pages will briefly introduce the historical context in which this debate developed.

The historical issue

Two main themes are present in the lengthy and complex historical debate on the relationship between Catholicism and the Holocaust,⁴ the Pontiff's words and actions on the one hand, and the influence of traditional forms of Christian anti-Jewish prejudice in shaping Vatican response to persecution on the other. The first relates to the lack of a clear statement from Pius XII criticising the Nazi extermination of the Jews during the conflict. Michael Phayer and Giovanni Miccoli have both argued that speaking out in support of the Jews was not at the head of the list of Vatican war-time priorities. Instead foremost among these was the fight against the Soviet Union and international Communism, both of which were seen as threats

4 An overview of the main themes can be found in Sanchez 2002, and in a more succinct (and critical) form in Marrus 2001.

looming over a weakened Europe.⁵ In Pacelli's view, Germany was a crucial bulwark in the struggle between Christianity and Bolshevism.⁶ Another reason the issue was sidelined was Catholicism's perceived need to preserve its integrity and avoid potentially schismatic tensions between Rome and the national churches, concerns relevant in Germany as well as in other Axis' countries.⁷ Moreover, Pius XII believed that a public denunciation would have worsened matters for the Jews themselves.⁸ Furthermore, the Pontiff envisaged a potential role as peacemaker for the Vatican, a desire that required maintaining neutrality and decline mention of specific instances of genocide in order avoid being perceived as siding with the Allies.⁹

The other main subject to which scholars have devoted their attention has been the study of the origins and the centrality of anti-Judaism in the history of Christian theology,¹⁰ as well as the role played by forms of prejudice against the Jews within Catholicism in facilitating Nazi persecution and in shaping Vatican response to their plight.¹¹ The fact that there is disagreement even on how to define the phenomenon well illustrates the sensitivity of the subject. In recent years, the term 'anti-Judaism' to refer to traditional Christian prejudice has gained currency, particularly among Catholic scholars, in order to highlight its difference from modern and Nazi anti-Semitism. This distinction is rejected by other scholars who, with different degrees of subtlety, prefer to highlight the continuities between the two forms of prejudice. Such is the case, for example, of the role played by important Catholic publications such as *La Civiltà Cattolica* in the rise of modern anti-Semitism.¹² Two of the most successful books published in recent years on the issue are David Kertzer's *Unholy War* and Daniel Goldhagen's *A Moral Reckoning* (both promptly translated into Italian,

5 Miccoli 2000: 30–1, 202–41.

6 Phayer 2000: 58.

7 See Marrus 2001: 46 and Miccoli 2005: 249.

8 Zuccotti 2000: 311; Blet 2002: 125.

9 Phayer 2000: 41–66; Miccoli 2000: 202–41 and 406–7.

10 Stefani 2004; Cohen 2007.

11 For two succinct discussions, see Miccoli 1991: 169–72; Moro 2002: 35–77.

12 Kertzer 2002: 133–51; Dahl 2003; Taradel and Raggi 2000.

in 2002 and 2003 respectively). While the former explicitly defines the Church as a major player in the rise of modern anti-Semitism in the nineteenth century,¹³ the latter simplistically conflates all distinctions between ancient and modern times, claiming that the Catholic Church 'has a bible problem' and that the only effective way to repair the harm would require nothing less than amending the New Testament.¹⁴

Although recent years have seen an increase in discussions and critiques of the Pontiff's conduct, the topic is hardly a new one. In fact, the development of two opposing and equally one-sided 'legends' on Pacelli (one criticising him for his failure to speak out, and another denying all allegations) can be dated back to the immediate postwar years.¹⁵ In Italy, as well as in France, intellectuals such as Albert Camus, François Mauriac and Ernesto Buonaiuti lamented the Pope's excessive diplomacy and questioned Christian conscience.¹⁶ Buonaiuti, in particular, saw Pacelli as the product of centuries of political compromise with governments to the detriment of the Church's spiritual mission.¹⁷ However, these criticisms failed to garner much attention. Pius XII's international prestige was high,¹⁸ and his papacy was widely described as a successful combination of diplomacy and charity.¹⁹

Moreover, as frequently noted in the literature, many Jewish institutions as well as survivors publicly expressed their gratitude to the Pontiff

13 Kertzer 2002: 7.

14 Goldhagen 2002: 257–68. Another overly one-sided account, this time by an Italian author, was Rivelli 2002.

15 Foa 2005: 320. See also Vian 2004.

16 Buonaiuti 1964: 177–96; Camus' critique of Pius XII was referenced in Fabro 1967: 147; Mauriac lamented the feebleness of the Pope's words in favour of the persecuted Jews in the foreword to Poliakov 1955: 10.

17 Buonaiuti 1964: 105–6. On the modernist movement within the Church, of which Buonaiuti was an important proponent, see Scoppola 1961.

18 Salvatorelli 1955: 138 acknowledged that, in the postwar years, Pius XII had enjoyed a degree of international prestige unmatched by any of his predecessors since 1848. See also Chabod 1961: 125.

19 Persico 2008: 70; Pollard 2008: 108–9.

in the years between the end of the war and the early 1960s.²⁰ Eucardio Momigliano's reference to the 'comfort obtained by the solidarity of Catholicism',²¹ introduced elsewhere in the book, was significant in this context. The Catholic Church was the only 'Italian' institution to emerge unscathed from the war and to hold an international profile.²² Emphasising the centrality of Catholic universalism in Italian culture was key to distancing Italy from Germany in the Allies' mind.²³ Questioning the integrity of Catholic response to the Holocaust would have implied casting a shadow on the country's own response to those events. This factor, along with the obvious centrality of Catholicism in Italy's postwar politics and culture, helps to explain the sensitivity of the subject. Thus, for well over fifteen years after the end of the war, the theme of the 'silence of Pius XII' was relatively marginal, and the few and disparate critiques did not find a receptive audience in the Italian political and cultural arena, neither in the pro-government side, nor amongst the opposition.

The Deputy

In a different historical context, these questions came to the fore with the international controversies raised by Rolf Hochhuth's play *The Deputy*. First published and staged in Germany in 1963 and swiftly translated into a number of languages,²⁴ *The Deputy* questioned the Vatican's silence during the Holocaust. The play pits the curia's failure to voice a moral

20 See, among the many, Blet 2002. Raffaele Cantoni, President of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities (UCII) from 1946 to 1951 expressed the gratitude of Italian Jews to Pius XII for the 'proofs of human brotherhood offered by the Catholic Church during the persecution', see Esposito 1964: 213, and Minerbi 1992: 148–50.

21 Momigliano 1946: 132.

22 Pollard 2008: 109.

23 See Focardi 1999; Schwarz 2004: 125.

24 Hochhuth 1963a; 1964a; 1964b; 1963b.

protest against the resolute determination to speak out expressed by the ambiguous and tragic historical figure of SS officer and saboteur of the Final Solution Kurt Gerstein,²⁵ and by the fictional (albeit loosely based on Bernhard Lichtenberg) Jesuit priest Riccardo Fontana. The latter, working in tandem with Gerstein, tries to convince the Vatican to denounce the extermination. After an unsuccessful meeting with the Pope, Fontana voluntarily dons the yellow badge and accompanies the Jews of Rome to the gas chamber in Auschwitz.²⁶

The Deputy represented a cornerstone in the historical evaluation of Pius XII, not so much for its own historiographical value, but because its success seriously damaged Pacelli's reputation (leading the Vatican to publish a large selection of documents held in its archives), and permanently changed the way his papacy is remembered and discussed.²⁷ The play provoked intense response wherever it was staged, and several books were published to discuss its reception and thesis.²⁸

The first signs of a change in the evaluation of Pius XII's policy came in 1960, with the publication in Germany of a book referencing the letter sent by the German Ambassador to the Vatican State, Weizsäcker, to the *Reichsaußenminister* Ribbentrop on 28 October 1943 (after the round-up of Rome's Jews) reassuring him of the Pope's unwillingness to raise his voice or increase tensions between the Vatican and Germany.²⁹ However, the sole echo of this publication in Italy hailed from Jesuit journal *La Civiltà Cattolica*, in the form of an article that introduced the standard exculpatory themes: that silence was a necessity in order to provide help to the

25 On Gerstein, see Friedländer 1967.

26 For a discussion of the symbolism behind Fontana's character, see Fraiman-Morris 2007.

27 Giovagnoli 2008: x. Persico 2008: 102, 378. The documents are collected in Blet *et al.* 1965–1981.

28 Among them, Bentley 1964; Nobécourt 1964; Günther 1963; Nesmy 1964; Adolph 1963; Fischer 1963; Raddatz: 1963.

29 The book is Schoenberger 1960. The letter is among the most oft-quoted pieces of evidence 'against' Pius XII; it is available in English language in Friedländer 1966: 207–8.

victims and avoid a further worsening of persecutions, and that many Jews expressed their gratitude after the war.³⁰

When Hochhuth's play – which was mainly based on the same material – came out, reactions were completely different.³¹ Even a cursory reconstruction of the Italian reception of *The Deputy* shows that a great deal more than theatre or historical accuracy was at stake. The heated Italian reception was inflamed with political quarrels between the government and the communists, controversy about the Italian Constitution, censorship, the use of police force to prevent performances, and bombing attacks. The mainstream Italian press reported on the performances of the play in other countries in rather impartial tones.³² The Catholic press, on the contrary, rose up against what they perceived to be a defamatory and immoral piece of work. The most authoritative defence of Pius XII came from the then Archbishop of Milan Cardinal Montini who, only weeks prior to his election as Pope Paul VI, published a letter in the British Catholic newspaper *The Tablet* reiterating the claim that rescue required silence.³³ At the same time, however, official and authoritative Catholic publications such as *L'Osservatore Romano* and *La Civiltà Cattolica* based their own defence on claims not entirely consistent with Montini's, suggesting that silence

30 Leiber 1961.

31 Renato Moro and Giovanni Miccoli list, among the reasons for the international controversy generated by the play, the broader renewal of Catholicism following the Second Vatican Council, the rising pacifist movement, and the easing of the Cold War, which combined resulted in widespread public calls for truth and justice. See Moro 2002: 22–30; Miccoli 2000: 2–4.

32 See Vittorio Brunelli, 'Una "prima" teatrale sucita tempeste a Berlino', *Corriere della Sera* (23 February 1963): 9; 'Corteo di proteste a Basilea per il "Vicario"', *Corriere della Sera* (25 September 1963): 9; V. 'I critici inglesi alle prese col dramma di Hochhuth', *Corriere della Sera* (27 September 1963): 9; Franco Occhiuzzi, 'Senza gravi incidenti "Il Vicario" a Nuova York', *Corriere della Sera* (28 February 1964): 9.

33 The original text of the letter in Italian was later published in Montini 1963. This view was also supported by Jemolo 1965: 275.

was mainly due to the fact that information about the genocide was not sufficiently accurate to justify an open intervention.³⁴

All institutional Catholic responses shared the emphasis on Jewish gratitude in the immediate postwar period and during the *Deputy* storm.³⁵ Two frequently-quoted references are the defence written by the director of the Intercultural Affairs Department of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith Joseph L. Lichten, and the highly inflated figures about Jews rescued thanks to the Papacy (between 150,000 and 400,000 in 1963, which became 800,000 a few years later) produced by the Israeli diplomat Pinchas E. Lapid.³⁶ As Susan Zuccotti has noted, these testimonies should be read more as political acts aimed at improving Jewish-Christian relations than as pieces of historical evidence.³⁷ Inter-confessional relations were in the foreground in the early 1960s, with persisting diplomatic skirmishes between the Vatican and the state of Israel over the Holy Land and the jurisdictional status of Jerusalem.³⁸ The process of theological revision started with the Second Vatican Council in 1962, which addressed Catholic anti-Jewish prejudice.

In contrast to the monolithic position expressed by the Catholic press, responses in the secular press need to be seen in the context of divisions in the Italian left, with the Socialist Party participating in the centre-left DC-led government, whilst the PCI was in opposition. The greater part of the debate was directly influenced by this political scene. *L'Unità* covered

34 See Alberto Giovannetti, 'Storia teatro e storie', *L'osservatore Romano* (5 April 1963): 3; Martini 1963; Martini 1964.

35 Esposito 1964: 210–32.

36 Originally published on 29 November 1963 by the National Welfare Conference, his article 'A Question of Judgment: Pius XII and the Jews' has been reproduced in Robert A. Graham 1988: 94–137. See Esposito 1964: 226 for the 150,000–400,000 figures, and Lapid 1967: 212–15.

37 Zuccotti 2002: 304, 394 n 7, for how Lapid came to the 800,000 figure.

38 On the relationship between the Vatican State and Israel, see Ferrari 1991. The diplomatic ramifications of the *Deputy* case were also mentioned by Arturo Carlo Jemolo, 'La Chiesa e gli ebrei', *La Stampa* (4 April 1964): 3.

the controversy extensively.³⁹ Its response to the play can be read as almost diametrically opposed to that of the Catholic press. What the latter saw as historically unfounded slander, the former saw as indisputable evidence that settled the controversy.⁴⁰ The same acts of rescue emphasised by the Catholic press were read by *l'Unità* as proof of the Church's failure to grasp the enormity of the extermination.⁴¹ Moreover, the neutrality that Pius XII's followers saw as motivated only by sheer necessity was interpreted by *l'Unità* as a far-from-neutral anticommunist and pro-'Nazi-fascist' stand.⁴² Indeed, the latter came to the extreme conclusion that 'in an age when all the civilised world fought to save civilisation, only Pius XII stood on Hitler's side'.⁴³

The spectrum of responses was obviously broader. Outside the communist-Catholic split, defenders of Pius XII also included liberals such as Giovanni Spadolini. The Republican MP supported the view that Pius XII had spoken out as clearly as the circumstances allowed him to, without compromising Vatican rescue efforts, and that the historical basis of Hochhuth's play was null.⁴⁴ A counterpoint to this defence was offered by voices that defended the play and were critical of Pacelli. Examples of this group include the call for a soul-searching analysis of the dilemmas faced by Christians during the war made by left-wing Christian intellectual

39 The Socialist newspaper *Avanti!* did not cover the debate extensively; it was unwilling to justify the censorship of the play, but was also unable to fully criticise PSI's government ally, the DC. *Avanti!*, then, dismissed *The Deputy* as a poor play, and the censorship as an unfortunate accident. See 'Interrogazioni del PSI sul "voto" al Vicario', *Avanti!* (16 February 1965): 1, 8; 'Al di là delle ipocrisie', *Avanti!* (16 February 1965): 1, 8; Nicola Badalucco, 'Giù la maschera', *Avanti!* (17 February 1965): 1.

40 Leo Vestri, 'Positivi commenti della critica al "Vicario"', *l'Unità* (27 September 1963): 7.

41 Libero Pierantozzi, 'Perché tacque il Vicario?', *l'Unità* (13 October 1964): 6.

42 Rubens Tedeschi, 'La politica di Pio XII nei documenti degli archivi nazisti', *l'Unità* (9 January 1965): 3; Rubens Tedeschi, 'Durante la guerra il Vaticano non fu mai neutrale', *l'Unità* (10 January 1965): 3; Rubens Tedeschi, 'Il cappello di arcivescovo per il monsignore nazista', *l'Unità* (23 February 1965): 6.

43 Tedeschi, 'Durante la guerra'.

44 Giovanni Spadolini, 'La verità sul "Vicario"', in Spadolini 1967: 286–7, 284.

Carlo Bo in the foreword to the Italian edition of *The Deputy*,⁴⁵ and more radical takes on the issue, such as those proposed by the radical intellectual Ernesto Rossi and by historian of Nazi Germany Enzo Collotti, both of whom praised the play's historical basis.⁴⁶

Besides these few examples, communist and Catholic responses form the core of the Italian reception of the *The Deputy*. While Italian Jews maintained themselves at something of a distance,⁴⁷ the clash between these two cultures, both far more influential in Italy than anywhere else in the Western world, served to a certain extent to hegemonise the debate, and the subject of Pius' silence and the Church's policy during the Second World War became the object of fierce political battle. Thus, while to a certain extent *The Deputy* marked the beginning of serious scholarly discussions,⁴⁸ the broader public debate in Italy was dominated by contemporary political themes.

Four aspects stand out in the Italian reception of *The Deputy*, all of which signal some serious difficulty in facing the issues brought forward in the play. The first involved the use of censorship: an attempt to stage *The Deputy* in Rome in 1965 was broken up by the police and prohibited under provision of the 1929 Concordat forbidding 'all offences or public insults committed within Italian territory against the person of the Supreme Pontiff.' The second crucial point is that the controversy reached the highest echelons of Italian government. During a question time in the Chamber of Deputies, The Minister of the Interior Paolo Emilio Taviani defended both the police's intervention and Pius' conduct during the Holocaust,

45 See Bo 1964a; see also Carlo Bo, 'È difficile liberarlo dalle storte polemiche', *Corriere della Sera* (18 October 1964): 11.

46 Rossi 2002: 225–35; Collotti 1964b.

47 For example, Luzzatto 1963 praises the play while at the same time glossing over its charges against Pius XII. Such a position was also motivated by the need to preserve good relations with the Catholic church in Italy, especially during discussions in the Second Vatican Council about revising traditional anti-Jewish liturgy. See Melloni 2000: 241–2.

48 For France, see Friedländer 1966; for the Anglo-American world, see Lewy 1964 and Conway 1968; for Italy see Falconi 1965 and Miccoli 1967.

arguing that the Pope had acted for the best and that nothing else could be done, thus trying to impose an official interpretation upon a far from settled historical debate.⁴⁹ Thirdly, the text of the play, which in other countries has been reprinted since its first run,⁵⁰ disappeared from the Italian market in 1968, only to be reissued by a tiny publisher in 2004.⁵¹ The fourth aspect is that the public debate engendered by the play in the Italian press offered very little historical analysis, and the subject-matter became little more than a pretext for political quarrels between the centre-left government and the communist opposition.

In short, caught between political skirmishes and calls for censorship, the public debate on *The Deputy* was stifled before it could fully develop. In the following years, the issue of the 'silence of Pius XII' resurfaced on several occasions, as with the publication of Robert Katz's books *Death in Rome* (on the Ardeatine Caves massacre) and *Black Sabbath* (on the roundup of the Jews in Rome on 16 October 1943).⁵²

Rappresaglia

Katz's *Black Sabbath*, which claimed that the Pontiff failed to act to avert the massacre, was adapted into the even more controversial feature film *Rappresaglia*. Here again, the state got the final official word, prosecuting

49 'Il governo prende tempo per rispondere su "Il Vicario"', *l'Unità* (16 February 1965): 1, 7; Fausto De Luca, 'Taviani spiega al Senato perché fu proibito "Il Vicario"', *La Stampa* (18 February 1965): 5. This was the second time that the government defended Pius XII: on 23 May 1964 the Minister of Foreign Affairs Saragat had defined critiques of Pius XII as a 'slander'; see Esposito 1964: 290.

50 See Hochhuth 1997 for the US, and for Germany Hochhuth 2001, with essays by Karl Jaspers, Erwin Piscator, and Golo Mann.

51 Hochhuth 2004.

52 Katz 1969; Katz 1967.

the historian Robert Katz and the director George Pan Cosmatos for libel against the memory of Pope Pacelli.

The film *Rappresaglia* (released in English as *Massacre in Rome*) was produced by Carlo Ponti and directed by George Pan Cosmatos in 1973. The director is also credited for the script, along with Robert Katz. Both the book and the film reconstructed one of the most well-known, tragic, and controversial episodes of the Resistance in Italy. On 23 March 1944, a battalion of Tyrolean police reservists was attacked by a group of resisters in the central via Rasella in Rome, and thirty-three of them were killed. As a reprisal, the German authorities ordered the killing of ten Italians for each German victim. Within less than thirty hours, 335 Italians (including 73 Jews, the five victims in excess were due to miscalculations while preparing the list) were executed at the Fosse Ardeatine (Ardeatine Caves) on the outskirts of Rome.

This event has become controversial in many respects.⁵³ In his book, Katz argued that only Pius XII had the power to do something to avert or postpone the reprisal.⁵⁴ However, according to Katz, the Pope remained silent for fear of jeopardising the status of open city for Rome, which was necessary for a smooth and uninterrupted shift of power from the Germans to the Allies. According to Katz, most of all Pacelli feared a left-led popular uprising originating from the Resistance.⁵⁵

Rappresaglia sustained many of the book's theses. The film presents the hours between the partisan action and the reprisal, from the opposite perspectives of the head of Gestapo in Rome, SS-*Obersturmbannführer* Herbert Kappler (played by Richard Burton), and the fictional Father Antonelli (Marcello Mastroianni). The two characters are similar in interest and sensibility, but divided by events they cannot stop or control.⁵⁶ While Kappler reluctantly obeys orders from Berlin and compiles the list of civilian victims (helped by the even more reluctant chief of Roman

53 Portelli 2003.

54 See Katz 1996: xi–xii, 224–5.

55 Katz 1996: 227.

56 Pietro Bianchi, 'Uno sguardo straniero su una tragedia nostra', *Il Giorno* (28 October 1973): 25.

police Pietro Caruso), Antonelli desperately tries to inform the Vatican of the approaching massacre. When he realises that the Pontiff is unwilling to take action to avert the executions, Antonelli decides to join the victims and die with them.

Whilst the international press focused almost entirely on Pius' silence,⁵⁷ in Italy the issue of Vatican silence shared the columnists' attention with the representation of the resisters and of Kappler. The screenplay, combined with Richard Burton's interpretation, was unanimously criticised for constructing an image of the SS official as a reluctant and literate humanist soldier, troubled by the dirty job he has to perform, as opposed to a willing perpetrator.⁵⁸ Many saw the danger of viewers identifying with, or at least seeing as justified, the 'necessary evil' of a Nazi character who was responsible, among other things, for the rounding up and deportation of Rome's Jews.⁵⁹ Father Antonelli served several narrative functions: one was to be Kappler's antagonist. The similarities between the two characters were read by literary scholar Carlo Salinari (who participated in the Via Rasella action) as a means of ennobling Kappler, presenting him as the only figure to truly care about Rome, while his fellow Nazis, fascists, resisters, and the Vatican itself were more concerned with their own particular interests.⁶⁰ Moreover, the film's construction was criticised by Salinari as too Kappler-centred, thus leaving in the background the victims, the Resistance, and Rome itself.⁶¹

57 See, as examples, the reviews by Milne 1975; and by Stuart 1975.

58 Bianchi, 'Sguardo': 25; Stefano Reggiani, 'Le Fosse Ardeatine in un film discusso', *La Stampa* (31 October 1973): 7; Domenico Meccoli, 'Perché tante polemiche intorno al film che rievoca l'attentato di Via Rasella', *Epoca*, 205 (4 November 1973): 200–2.

59 Salinari 1973a; Reggiani, 'Fosse Ardeatine'; Ugo Finetti, 'Difesa di Kappler per Via Rasella', *Avanti!* (28 October 1973): 13.

60 Salinari 1973a: 3900.

61 Carlo Salinari, 'Un protagonista dell'azione esamina il film e lo giudica', *Il Giorno* (28 October 1973): 5.

Father Antonelli was also a counterpoint to the Vatican's silence. The influence of Hochhuth's play on the film was immediately recognised by reviewers.⁶² Antonelli and Fontana are fictional characters whose sacrifice compensates for Pius XII's supposed excessive diplomacy. Ten years after *The Deputy*, reviews were notably less obsequious towards the Vatican, not just in the left-wing press, but also in centrist and liberal publications. *La Stampa* and *Panorama* framed the issue with a series of dubitative propositions, but concluded that Katz's book offered convincing answers.⁶³ Others were more resolute. On the left, Katz's interpretation was adopted and defended,⁶⁴ although the film was criticised for being superficial. According to *Rinascita*'s film critic Mino Argentieri, *Rappresaglia* failed to explain how Vatican silence was due to its policy aimed at weakening the Resistance.⁶⁵ Communist commentators, then, praised the film for having presented to a large audience an issue until then confined to limited sections of the public, but they also criticised it for watering down the critique of Pacelli's real silence with the redeeming fictional figure of Antonelli.⁶⁶

Yet, while on the left the representation of Vatican silence was criticised for being too feeble, the Catholic media rose up to 'firmly deplore' what the Vatican Radio and the *Osservatore Romano* defined as an 'ignoble denigration'.⁶⁷ Their argument followed the line adopted ten years earlier. Historical evidence countering the charges and sneering expressions against the opponents could co-exist even in the same article. For example, historian Robert Graham defined Katz's account as being filled with fantasies, inventions, absurdities, and sheer forgery.⁶⁸

62 See Meccoli, 'Perché tante polemiche', p. 201; Mino Argentieri, 'Un brutto romanzo su Via Rasella', *Rinascita*, 43 (2 November 1973): 22.

63 Reggiani, 'Fosse Ardeatine' 1973; Tullio Kezich, 'Rappresaglia', *Panorama* (1 November 1973): 27–8.

64 Morandini 1973; Salinari, 'Protagonista'.

65 Argentieri, 'Brutto romanzo': 22.

66 Salinari 1973a: 3900.

67 Morandini 1973: 91; Meccoli, 'Perché tante polemiche': 200.

68 As an example, see Graham 1973: 470.

As with *The Deputy*, the Italian state was called upon to adjudicate on these historical matters. This time it was not Parliament, but a court. Katz, Cosmatos, and the producer Ponti were accused by a niece of Pacelli's of having composed an 'indecent deformation of reality [...] devoid of any [...] critical reflection, thus causing the historical insult to coincide with the libel of His Holiness Pius XII.'⁶⁹ With the Vatican archives unavailable for independent researchers, and the multi-volume collection of Vatican documents still in press, the tribunal relied on testimonies (including those of war criminals such as Kappler and Dollmann). Despite these shortcomings, the court came to the conclusion that there was 'one and only truth: [...] the Pontiff knew nothing.'⁷⁰ The verdict sentenced Katz to fourteen months in jail, and seven for Cosmatos and Ponti.⁷¹

The cases of *The Deputy* and of *Rappresaglia* show how politically sensitive the issue of Pius XII's silence was in the Italy of the 1960s and 1970s. The disproportionate response by the State shows that the issue lay at the limits, if not beyond, legitimate public debate. However, what was controversial was not the Pontiff's response to the Holocaust. The Holocaust was one element among others in a debate mainly centred on what was seen as Pacelli's phobic anticommunism and pro-Fascism on the one hand, and a communist assault on Christianity on the other.⁷²

69 Liliana Madeo, 'Kappler chiamato come teste sull'operato di Papa Pacelli', *La Stampa* (30 January 1974): 8.

70 'Sentenza del Tribunale Penale di Roma', 27 November 1975, p. 127, referenced in Katz 1996: xi.

71 Franco Scattoni, 'Pesante sentenza contro lo scrittore Robert Katz', *L'Unità* (28 November 1975): 6. The verdict was overturned on appeal; the three were re-tried, re-convicted, and eventually amnestied. See on this Katz 2003: 353–4.

72 For an example, see the biography of Pacelli published in 1974 in the PCI magazine *Il calendario del popolo*; Massara 1974a; Massara 1974b.

A partial confrontation in the 1980s and 1990s

From the 1980s onwards, the Holocaust as a distinct catastrophe motivated by anti-Semitism acquired an increasing centrality in historical discourse and in public memory.⁷³ The 'silence of Pius XII' and Catholic anti-Jewish prejudice became objects of renewed interest. Alongside the work of scholars,⁷⁴ the Catholic Church itself played an important role in this process. The Second Vatican Council, in particular with the *Nostra Aetate* Encyclical of 1965, already represented a cornerstone in the revision of Catholicism's relationship with Judaism.⁷⁵ However, it was only during the pontificate of John Paul II that the Holocaust gained full centrality.⁷⁶ Through important symbolic acts, such as his visits to Auschwitz in 1979, to the Synagogue of Rome in 1986, and to the State of Israel in 2000, the Pontiff went to great lengths to improve inter-confessional dialogue.⁷⁷ However, if we look at Catholicism more generally, it is clear that this process was far from straightforward. The controversy over the erection of a Carmelite convent in Auschwitz, which dominated the latter half of the 1980s, revived discussions over the Christianisation of the Holocaust.⁷⁸ Furthermore, official Catholic narratives of Christian responsibility in the rise of modern anti-Semitism were often historically weak.

An example of the latter attitude is offered by the document, issued in 1998 by the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah*.⁷⁹ Consistent with other recent statements,⁸⁰ the cover letter penned by John Paul II identified the Holocaust as an 'indelible stain' and an 'unspeakable iniquity' that must

73 A succinct analysis of this growth can be read in Judt 2005: 803–26.

74 For an overview of part of the literature, see Dietrich 2002.

75 See Miccoli 1999b.

76 Moro 2007: 32–4.

77 See Braham 1999: 224–5.

78 See Bartoszewski 1990; Rittner and Roth 1991.

79 Commission for Religious relations with the Jews 1988.

80 See, for example, Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews 1974.

be remembered by the Church and commit it to fight anti-Semitism in any form. It also acknowledged the 'sentiments of anti-Judaism in some Christian quarters' influenced by 'certain interpretations of the New Testament regarding the Jewish people as a whole.' However, it also carefully circumscribed the responsibility to the 'sons and daughters of the Church' who harboured those sentiments, thus absolving the institution as such. In order to do this, the document presented a highly selective account of relations between Christianity and Judaism over the centuries that seriously simplified the role played by Christian elites in fuelling popular prejudice against the Jews.⁸¹ Moreover, *We Remember* reinforced the distinction between Christian anti-Judaism (based exclusively on religion) and the sociological and political nature of modern anti-Semitism.

This rather simplified view of the links between religious and political prejudice against the Jews allowed the document to refrain from a closer analysis of the areas of continuity between the two phenomena,⁸² thus presenting Nazism as a 'thoroughly modern neo-pagan regime' whose anti-Semitism had 'its roots outside of Christianity.'⁸³ While the document acknowledged that not all Christians responded in the most appropriate way to the extermination, it also somewhat selectively cherry-picked the few condemnations of Nazi racism voiced by German clergymen.⁸⁴ Finally, with regard to Pius XII, it did not engage with the theme of 'silence,' instead limiting itself to reaffirming a well-rehearsed list of eulogies.⁸⁵

Some of these views did not go entirely uncontested within Italian Catholicism. Writing in *Rocca* Giancarlo Zizola severely criticised the document for its reticence, which denoted a resistance within the Church against John Paul II's *mea culpa*.⁸⁶ In an interview published in *Famiglia Cristiana*, historian Giorgio Vecchio criticised the document for shifting

81 See Miccoli 1999a: 9; Stefani 2004: 263; Braham 1999: 225.

82 On this, see Isaac 1959: 508.

83 See Kertzer 2002: 6–9.

84 As with other aspects of the document, the issue is more complex. See Phayer 2000: 67–81; Braham 1999: 227–32.

85 Commission for Religious relations with the Jews 1988: n 16.

86 Zizola 1998.

the burden of Christian responsibility entirely onto individuals while at the same time passing over the Vatican's weak response to the 1938 racial laws.⁸⁷ The monthly *Jesus* clearly accepted the thesis that Catholic prejudice against the Jews could not merely be confined to the realm of theology, but that it played a part in laying the ground for the Holocaust.⁸⁸ Accordingly, the journal saw *We Remember* as a small step in a much broader process of coming to terms with the Church's own guilt.⁸⁹ However, the same issue included an interview with Father Blet in defence of Pius XII, thus clearly circumscribing the area of infra-Catholic criticism.⁹⁰

The years between the release of *The Deputy* and *Amen.* saw some significant changes. Firstly, the Holocaust (and anti-Semitism as its main cause) became a pivotal feature of Western memory culture. Partly as a response to this shift, Catholicism's relationship with Judaism underwent a gradual process of rethinking, from *Nostra Aetate* to *We Remember*. Nevertheless, whilst constituting a clear apology for wrongs committed by Christians, this latter document also concurred in drawing a line beyond which criticism was utterly rejected: the Church as such was guiltless, Pius XII's beatification was sanctioned to go ahead, and critiques of his actions during the war were rejected. Unsurprisingly, the same attitude informed many Catholic responses to *Amen.*, with little substantial difference, in particular in the institutional press, from the discussion of *The Deputy* some forty years before. In non-Catholic media, the Pontiff's silence was explained in terms quite different from those that dominated the debate in the 1960s and 1970s. Since then, anticommunism has moved to the background, to be replaced by anti-Judaism.

87 Renzo Giacomelli, "Noi ricordiamo. E ci pentiamo", *Famiglia Cristiana*, 68/12 (1 April 1998): 69–71.

88 Pelagatti 2000.

89 Giuntella 2000. See also Zizola 1997.

90 Casu 2000.

Amen.

Amen. premiered at the Berlin Film Festival on 13 February 2002. Based on *The Deputy*, Costa-Gavras' film follows Gerstein and Fontana in their frustrated attempts to activate the Vatican and convince the Pope to publicly expose the extermination. However, there are some differences between the play and its filmic adaptation. For example, the film opens with Stefan Lux's suicide in the assembly room of the League of Nations in Geneva.⁹¹ According to the director, this addition to Hochhuth's text was meant to stress the fact that indifference to the extermination was widespread.⁹² Furthermore, while in the play the feebleness of the Pontiff plays a central role, in the film Fontana's moral strength is in the foreground. For this reason, Costa-Gavras claimed that *Amen.* was not anti-Catholic per se.⁹³ This assessment of the film may be seen as supported by the fact that Pius XII and the curia are less real characters than typified representations of power, whose insensitivity to human suffering is a counterpoint to the rising awareness of the two leads.⁹⁴

In this sense, then, *Amen.* was consistent with much of Costa-Gavras' previous work. As in *Z* (1969) and in *Missing* (1982), *Amen.* is the story of an individual's quest for justice that is ultimately frustrated by a 'power' whose main concern is self-preservation. By the same token, both in *Amen.* and in his previous Holocaust-related film *Music Box* (1989), the characters obey their own sense of morality whatever the costs of doing so.⁹⁵ Not one of these themes entered into discussions of the films. The representation of the curia as a political body trapped in a web of diplomatic tactics and

91 A.C. 2002b.

92 Tassone 2002: 44.

93 Antonio Termenini, 'Libera nos a malo', *Film TV*, 10/16 (21–27 April 2002): 97–8.

94 The stereotyped representation of the Vatican has been noted and criticised in Termenini 2002b; Tassi 2002. See also Giorgio Carbone, 'L'Olocausto che nessuno voleva vedere', *Liberio* (19 April 2002): 27.

95 See De Bonis 2002: 83.

deaf to its moral mission to denounce evil, along with the film's provocative poster, designed by Oliviero Toscani, depicting a swastika-shaped cross, dominated the scene, often serving as a springboard for confrontations that bypassed the film itself.

The reception of *Amen.* often mingled history and politics and presented a degree of divergence between two macro political and cultural fields. In the Catholic press and on the right of the political spectrum the film was overwhelmingly judged in negative terms, while on the left, there were more positive responses. This is hardly surprising considering the politicisation of history in Italy, the sensitivity of this specific issue, and the strong Catholic presence in Italian public life. However, the incendiary terms of the past did not mark the reception of *Amen.*, thus allowing for a more open, albeit superficial, public debate.

Catholic criticisms

Much of the Catholic response to *Amen.* seemed informed by the belief, expressed by the journal *Vita e pensiero*, that a negative judgment of Pius XII had become hegemonic in society.⁹⁶ Given this premise, the Catholic press vehemently countered the charges of silence put forward in the film and in many historical works circulating at the time. *La Civiltà Cattolica* published a series of historical articles in defence of Pius XII.⁹⁷ It set the tone in an editorial referring in particular to Kertzer's book and to *Amen.*, criticising the recent 'attacks against Pius XII' in the scholarly literature and in popular culture.⁹⁸ This piece was discussed by the journal historian Giovanni Sale. While he did not support them, he acknowledged as historically legitimate the interpretations that see Pius XII's response as

96 Giovagnoli 2003: 108.

97 Sale 2002a; Sale 2002b; Sale 2002c; Sale 2002d; Giovanni Sale 2003; Blet 2002.

98 'Sui recenti attacchi contro Pio XII' 2002: 3.

'objectively' too diplomatic (Phayer) and inadequate (Zuccotti, Miccoli, and Andrea Riccardi), although the Pontiff was 'subjectively' convinced that he had spoken out against the extermination.⁹⁹ However, Sale also dismissed any explanation based on Pacelli's alleged pro-Nazism or anti-Semitism.¹⁰⁰

The circulation of the latter explanation in more popular venues (including films such as *Amen.*) was the subject of Pierre Blet's contribution to the debate. While Blet's standard defence of the Pontiff was based on an established body of evidence and testimonies, the closing paragraph of his article added a further element of interest. Here, Blet concluded that 'under the liberal mask, anonymous forces [...] work to undermine the Papacy and the Catholic Church.'¹⁰¹ Writing in *L'Osservatore Romano*, Margherita Marchione added that charges against Pius XII were to be considered as charges against the whole Church.¹⁰² Thus, it seems legitimate to apply to the Italian context Susan Zuccotti's comment made with regard to the United States that some papal defenders 'seem to believe that the best defence is a good offense. They attack the motives of papal critics, charging that they are anti-Catholics.'¹⁰³ The importance of Blet's words is highlighted by the fact that they were also reproduced in *Avvenire*.¹⁰⁴ The Bishop's newspaper did not speculate further on who was behind the 'anonymous forces', but the most immediate targets were John Cornwell,¹⁰⁵ David Kertzer, and most clearly of all Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, whose *A Moral Reckoning* was defined by Father Gumpel (the relator of the beatifica-

99 For a critique of Sale's use of categories such as 'good faith' in the discussion of Pius XII's actions during the war, see Miccoli 2004: 494.

100 Sale 2002d: 551–3.

101 Blet 2002: 131.

102 Margherita Marchione, 'Ancora su Pio XII e gli ebrei', *L'Osservatore Romano* (17 November 2002): 3.

103 Zuccotti 2003: 690.

104 Gian Maria Vian, 'Quel complotto dietro le accuse a Pio XII', *Avvenire* (19 July 2002): 21.

105 Cornwell 1999.

tion cause of Pius XII) as a 'rant against the Catholic Church.'¹⁰⁶ In a short circuit that highlights the frequent overlap between history and domestic politics, *Avvenire* dismissed Goldhagen as an historian who should write for *il manifesto* or *l'Unità*, thus accommodating this historical controversy to Italy's familiar left-right divide (and implicitly ascribing to the left all 'anti-Pius XII' positions).¹⁰⁷

In this context, the institutional Catholic press, in particular *Avvenire*, harshly dismissed *Amen.*, its historical thesis, and its director, lamenting the way the film represented the Church as a stereotyped political body concerned only with secular power.¹⁰⁸ Although in different tones, the dozens of magazines controlled by the Catholic *San Paolo* media conglomerate also countered the film, offering the established defence of Pius XII whose tenets had not changed since the early 1960s.¹⁰⁹

The poster advertising the film received as much attention as the film itself. While the monthly journal *Jesus* interpreted Toscani's graphic design as a further sign of the escalating language of war in the wake of 9/11,¹¹⁰ *Avvenire* saw it not only as historically misleading, but also as an attack on the symbol of Christianity and Italy's supposed religious identity.¹¹¹

106 Blet 2002: 131. See also Antonio Gaspari, 'Ma Pacelli aiutò gli ebrei', *Avvenire* (9 September 2000): 19; 'Caso Pio XII, Cornwell in tribunale', *Avvenire* (5 October 2000): 22; Rosso Malpelo, 'Lupus in pagina', *Avvenire* (21 October 2000): 21, and Massimo Giuliani, 'Papi davvero antisemiti? Una storia a tesi', *Avvenire* (24 January 2002): 23. Rosso Malpelo is the moniker adopted by RAI journalist Gianni Gennari.

107 Rosso Malpelo, 'Lupus in pagina', *Avvenire* (23 February 2002): 21.

108 Gaspari, 'Ma Pacelli'; Rosso Malpelo, 'Lupus in pagina', *Avvenire* (30 March 2002): 21; Massimo Bernardini, 'La Chiesa? Nel film è solo potere', *Avvenire* (19 April 2002): 25; Francesco Bolzoni, 'Un pamphlet su Pio XII e gli ebrei che dimentica volutamente la storia', *Avvenire* (19 April 2002): 25.

109 See the two instalments confutation of the 'silence' thesis by Esposito 2002a, and Esposito 2002b. In July 2002, the popular weekly magazine *Famiglia Cristiana* reprinted and enclosed Tornielli 2001.

110 Marras 2002.

111 As example of these complaints, see Rosso Malpelo, 'Lupus in pagina', *Avvenire* (16 February 2002): 21, and Lucetta Scaraffia, 'Per favore, non mischiate la croce e la svastica', *Avvenire* (20 February 2002): 21.

However, the leftist magazine *Avvenimenti*, often open to more radical Catholic views, read the whole issue differently. It argued that the poster simply conflated the fate of the two heroes, Gerstein and Fontana, ignored by the Pontiff.¹¹² Consistently, Pius XII was criticised for speaking the language of diplomacy in an age requiring that of prophecy.¹¹³ In other words, according to this critique, Pacelli put his *sapiential* mission (i.e. alleviating sufferings while allowing the Church some room for diplomatic action) ahead of the *prophetic* one (voicing a public protest).¹¹⁴ The dialectic between prophecy and diplomacy is the eldest of the two main strands of historiographical debate on Pacelli's silence, dating back to the early criticisms of Mauriac and Buonaiuti, and is perhaps the matter that has been most freely discussed by Catholic scholars.¹¹⁵ With its stress on the political and diplomatic perspective, it also implicitly deflates the role played by internal Catholic dynamics such as the development of anti-Judaism. The reception of *Amen.* in Catholic media reflects this less than thorough engagement with the Christian past. Non-Catholic sources were more open in the discussion of these matters.

Jewish contributions to the debate

For many years after the war, Italian Jews discussed Christian anti-Semitism in Jewish publications, but their views rarely found a broader readership. While there were few specifically Jewish responses to *Amen.* available in

112 Callisto Cosulich, 'I silenzi di Pio XII tra croci e svastiche', *Avvenimenti*, 16 (26 April 2002): 47.

113 Alceste Santini, 'Aperti gli archivi segreti del Vaticano', *Avvenimenti*, 9 (8 March 2002): 35. This critique reproduces almost verbatim the one advanced in Aubert 1979: 38.

114 On this, see Persico 2008: 293–303.

115 See, for example, Duce 2006, and for some defensive takes on the issue Chenaux 2004, Sale 2002d: 553, and Sale 2004: 236–7.

mainstream media, it must be pointed out that, unlike in the past, the debates of those years did include a variety of Jewish voices. As noted, this was mainly due to the general shift in Holocaust consciousness in Italy's memory culture in the 1990s, in which the Jewish specificity of the event started to be fully acknowledged. Before the *Amen.* debate, these opinions were mainly solicited by moderate newspapers such as *Corriere della Sera* and *La Stampa*, and in *l'Unità* to comment on every turn in the discussion.

Unsurprisingly, opinions varied. For example, while former community leaders Elio Toaff and Tullia Zevi, Holocaust survivor and writer Edith Bruck, and Nobel laureate Rita Levi Montalcini praised *We Remember* as a cornerstone in Jewish-Catholic relations,¹¹⁶ others such as Arrigo Levi, Michele Sarfatti, and Fiamma Nirenstein voiced their disappointment with the document's inadequateness to fully come to terms with the past.¹¹⁷ By the same token, the newly elected head of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities Amos Luzzatto was less than enthusiastic about the beatification of Pius XII, which he defined (perhaps as a diplomatic move) as not pertaining to Jewish concerns,¹¹⁸ and openly critical, in a front page column in *l'Unità*, of the beatification of Edith Stein.¹¹⁹ In 2000, John Paul II's visit to Israel received widespread praise as a cornerstone event in Jewish-Catholic relations.¹²⁰ Thus, although the run of *Amen.* did not

116 'Tullia Zevi e Elio Toaff: "tappa di un lungo cammino"', *l'Unità* (17 March 1998): 9; Liliana Rosi, 'E ora si devono aprire gli archivi ...', *l'Unità* (17 March 1998): 9.

117 Alessandra Baduel, 'Michele Sarfatti: "Ci vorrebbe la scomunica per i rei di delitti razziali"', *l'Unità* (16 March 1998): 9.; Arrigo Levi, 'La Teshuvà della Chiesa', *Corriere della Sera* (17 March 1998): 10; Fiamma Nirenstein, 'Pentimento senza verità storica', *La Stampa* (17 March 1998): 1.

118 Alceste Santini, 'Pio XII e il nazismo, il peso di quei silenzi', *l'Unità* (29 September 1998): 19.

119 Amos Luzzatto, 'La conversione non c'entra col martirio', *l'Unità* (12 October 1998): 1–2. A Catholic response to Luzzatto's critiques was written by Edith Stein's biographer Rodolfo Girardello, 'Non è il caso di fare guerre di religione', *l'Unità* (12 October 1998): 1–2.

120 See Abraham Yehoshua in Umberto De Giovannangeli, "'Noi, fratelli ebrei emozionati dal Papa"', *l'Unità* (24 March 2000): 2; Amos Luzzatto, Tullia Zevi, Enrico

solicit Jewish responses in the mainstream and in the Jewish press, the quantity and variety of Jewish interventions in the broader debate rules out the possibility that their absence was motivated by the sensitivity of the subject. The times when it was very hard for Jews to discuss these issues in Italy, as lamented by *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* during the *Deputy* controversy,¹²¹ belonged to the past. This change in the cultural context is exemplified by the way the mainstream press discussed the issue.

The mainstream press

In the years and months prior the release of *Amen.*, these themes were discussed very frequently. A simple query in the indexed archives of *Corriere della Sera*, *La Stampa*, and *la Repubblica* combining the words 'Pio XII', and 'Olocausto' (or 'Shoah') in the period between the release of *We Remember* in March 1998 and the premiere of *Amen.* in February 2002 returns a remarkable average of more than one item per month for each newspaper, for four consecutive years.¹²² None of the newspapers took an explicit stand, informing readers of developments in the debate, reviewing major scholarly works appearing in the Italian market, and presenting different views.¹²³

Finzi in 'Un segnale per tutti i cattolici', *l'Unità* (24 March 2000): 2; Alceste Santini, 'Il Pontefice chiede perdono agli ebrei', *l'Unità* (24 March 2000): 3; Alceste Santini, 'Nel segno del dialogo', *l'Unità* (25 March 2000): 1, 17; David Meghnagi, 'Il passo più difficile', *l'Unità* (25 March 2000): 1, 18.

121 See Loria 1965: 37.

122 198 occurrences overall: 50 for *la Repubblica*, 101 for *Corriere della Sera*, and 47 for *La Stampa*.

123 As examples, see Sergio Luzzatto, 'La Chiesa responsabile nella genesi dell'Olocausto', *La Stampa*, TTL (2 March 2002): 4 (review of the Italian translation of Kertzer 2002); Giovanni Berardelli, 'Pio XII e gli ebrei, tutte le ragioni di quel silenzio', *Corriere della Sera* (18 May 2002): 37 (review of Moro 2002); Nello Ajello, 'Gli occhi chiusi di Pio XII', *la Repubblica* (18 April 2000): 51 (review of Miccoli 2000).

This sense of balance can also be seen in their reception of *Amen*. *Corriere* and *La Stampa*'s reviews shifted their focus away from the theme of Pius XII's silence to the dilemma between moral conscience and *Realpolitik*,¹²⁴ while *Repubblica* criticised the film for being exceedingly detached in its approach to a red-hot topic.¹²⁵ Accounts of the launch conference were balanced by defensive views of Pacelli.¹²⁶ These approaches highlight one shortcoming in the debate. With few, if any, serious attempts to tackle the subject from a scholarly perspective, the issue could only be dealt with superficially in terms of innocence and guilt. Implicitly divisive, these categories fulfilled a need for clear-cut distinctions in large sections of the public,¹²⁷ and facilitated the transformation of the issue into a spectacle.¹²⁸ An example of these trends was offered by the mock trial of Pius XII staged during the *Festival dei Due Mondi* in Spoleto in July 2002, when two real-life magistrates (Ferdinando Imposimato and Carlo Nordio acting respectively as the prosecution and the defence) made their case and spectators meted out the verdict (reportedly, a tie).¹²⁹ For all these reasons, the mainstream press was extra cautious in presenting opinions that were often mutually incompatible. In order to find less guarded (but not necessarily more informed) opinions about the film and its theme, we must look to the more politically committed press.

124 Tullio Kezich, 'Dal teatro allo schermo, un 'Amen' avvincente', *Corriere della Sera* (14 February 2002): 39; Alessandra Levantesi, 'Dura scelta fra morale e realpolitik', *La Stampa* (14 February 2002): 27.

125 Roberto Nepoti, 'Il silenzio di Pio XII davanti alla Shoah', *la Repubblica* (22 April 2002): 34.

126 Giuseppe Manin, 'Il "silenzio" di Pio XII scuote Berlino', *Corriere della Sera* (14 February 2002): 39; Fulvia Caprara, 'Pio XII. Berlino accusa', *La Stampa* (14 February 2002): 27; see also Maria Pia Fusco, 'Scandalo sopra Berlino: "la Chiesa muta sui lager"', *la Repubblica* (14 February 2002): 45.

127 On this, see Miccoli 2004: 507.

128 It should also be noted that some of these traits have also influenced history-writing; see Rumi 2005: 82–6.

129 Leonetta Bentivoglio, 'Spoleto giudica Pio XII a teatro: la corte si spacca', *la Repubblica* (14 July 2002): 36.

Diverging responses on the right and on the left

An analysis of the conservative press shows a strong affinity between its positions, unanimous in the rejection of the film's thesis, and those held by institutional Catholicism. National Alliance's newspaper *Secolo d'Italia* questioned *Amen*'s historical worth and interpreted both the film and the burgeoning literature criticising the Vatican as the result of a crisis of values affecting contemporary society.¹³⁰ By the same token, *Il Giornale* defined the film as a pure fantasy that twisted the evidence, while *Liberio* lamented the lack of films about the Jews saved by Pius XII.¹³¹

The left-wing press responded quite differently to the issues surrounding the film. In the years prior the release of *Amen*, *l'Unità* had participated in the debate engendered by the *We Remember* document and John Paul II's trip to Israel, and had often espoused a variety of Jewish points of view, as well as giving room to several Catholic voices favouring inter-confessional dialogue.¹³² This non-confrontational approach was reflected in the newspaper's take on *Amen*, and *l'Unità* did not enter the fray.¹³³ The communist daily *il manifesto* assumed a more resolute approach, arguing that the film's thesis was solid, and faulting it only for having failed to develop the analysis of the link between the industrial company IG Farben and the Zyklon-B

130 Marco Respinti, 'Ma Costa-Gavras non ha internet?', *Secolo d'Italia* (17 April 2002): 10; Priscilla Del Ninno, 'L'ora dei dogmi anticlericali', *Secolo d'Italia* (20 April 2002): 18.

131 Andrea Tornielli, 'Così la verità dei fatti è finita in un "Amen"', *Il Giornale* (18 April 2002): 19; Caterina Maniaci, '"Amen": a quando un film che racconti la verità su Pio XII?', *Liberio* (19 April 2002): 27.

132 See as examples the interview with then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (then head of the Catholic Church's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith), '"Sì, la Chiesa ha facilitato la Shoah". Ratzinger parla di "scarsa responsabilità"', *l'Unità* (16 March 1999), and the article written by the Bishop Emeritus of Acerra Antonio Riboldi, I.C., '"Sì, potevamo fare di più"', *l'Unità* (17 March 1998): 1, 8.

133 Dario Zonta, '"Amen": il Vaticano e i campi di sterminio', *l'Unità* (26 April 2002): 23.

used in the gas chambers.¹³⁴ Picking up on Costa-Gavras' remark that *Amen.* was mainly a work about the consequences of indifference, silence, and passivity, *il manifesto* projected its themes onto the present.¹³⁵ The exacerbation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the spring 2002 favoured *il manifesto*'s universalising of the film. According to the paper, then, *Amen.* was not only a story about the Holocaust, but also about Western societies' silence in the present.¹³⁶ Traditionally pro-Palestinian, the newspaper, while maintaining the historical critique of Vatican policy explicitly made in the film, also hinted at present concerns. In other words, the message *il manifesto* seemed to convey was that silence was a moral guilt during the Holocaust, just as it was now in the Middle-Eastern crisis.

Amen. as a Holocaust film

As the analysis of these debates has shown, discussions on the theme of the 'silence of Pius XII' present a certain circularity whereby, as in faulty dialectics, opposing theses manage to converge into only an incomplete synthesis. One consequence of this defective dialogue was that every new turn in the events, occasioned by books, supposed new archival findings, or as in this case, films, met with a set of previously entrenched and often conflicting responses. As regards *Amen.*, this meant that precious little space was dedicated to the discussion of the film's merits and shortcomings as a Holocaust representation. The debate served to boost the film's popularity, but ironically *Amen.* was only rarely received as a Holocaust film, even in a very Holocaust-conscious cultural milieu. In order to find

134 Roberto Silvestri, 'Contro il silenzio "Amen"', *il manifesto* (14 February 2002): 15; Iaia Vantaggiato, 'Tacere nel nome di Cristo', *il manifesto* (28 April 2002): 12.

135 Antonello Catacchio, 'Il silenzio svelato', *il manifesto* (19 February 2002): 14; Arianna Di Genova, 'La svastica sul cupolone', *il manifesto* (18 April 2002): 15.

136 Di Genova, 'Svastica'; Vantaggiato, 'Tacere'.

discussions of *Amen.* as a Holocaust film, one must look at the reviews published in cinema journals and in the culture section of newspapers. These were usually much less confrontational and divisive than the articles printed in the political pages.¹³⁷

These publications also touched upon other themes in their discussion of the film. For example, *Il Giornale di Sicilia* stressed the fact that Pius XII's silence was almost in the background, overshadowed by other powerful scenes in the film.¹³⁸ The latter included the Nazi education of children, the sharp discomfort caused by the *Stille Nacht* sung by a groups of SS as a way to represent the 'banality of evil,' and most pointedly, the representation of the Holocaust. The film magazine *Duel* stated that what saved the film in aesthetic terms was the choice to represent the destruction of the Jews without really showing it. Costa-Gavras used two strategies to achieve this. The first was to disseminate the narrative with the metonymy of freight trains going eastwards with locked doors and coming back empty, to signify the extermination process and the contrast between its deadly relentlessness and the slow pace of diplomacy. The second was the decision to represent the death of a group of Jews in the gas chamber only through the devastating effect witnessing it has on Gerstein, thus forcing viewers to question their own frustrated desire to watch.¹³⁹ Costa-Gavras explained this decision as deriving from cinema's inbuilt incapacity to re-create the extermination, and defined it as a rejection of Spielberg's Hollywood model adopted in *Schindler's List*.¹⁴⁰

However, there was a substantial Hollywood element to *Amen.* Its construction and style were in many senses not dissimilar from those of a Hollywood production. Moreover, *Amen.* shares another important aspect

137 For example, both the right-wing *Il Tempo*, one of Rome's newspapers, and the left-wing *Cineforum* faulted the film for its poor narrative construction and stereotyped representation of the curia; see Rondi 2002; Terminiini 2002b; Tassi 2002.

138 Napoli 2002.

139 Zappoli 2002. The director's aesthetic choices were also noted by Kezich, 'Dal teatro allo schermo'; Caprara, 'Croce'; A.C. 2002a; Bevione 2002.

140 Pedro Armocida, 'Costa-Gavras: "l'aiuto degli storici non mi serve"', *Il Giornale* (18 April 2002): 19.

with popular Holocaust films released in the last decades. As the reviewer of an Italian local newspaper noted, without the Pius XII controversy, *Amen.* could easily have figured among the many films presenting characters who oppose the Holocaust with all their moral energies (as, for instance, in *Life Is Beautiful* or *Jakob the Liar*).¹⁴¹ Moreover, the character of Gerstein shares an important trait with numerous cinematic predecessors, following a trend first set by the very epitome of the 'American Holocaust film': *Schindler's List*. Schindler and Gerstein are not just Righteous among the Nations, they are also Nazis. In an age of moderate ideological conflict, representing heroes among perpetrators is not deemed as inappropriate. Be it a crooked capitalist as Oskar Schindler, or an SS officer like Gerstein, the line is drawn on a moral level rather than a political one. Gerstein (along with Fontana) and Schindler are Holocaust heroes for the post-ideological age. Beyond its controversial subject, then, *Amen.* is part of a much broader strand of recent Holocaust representations. As I will show in the conclusion, these narrative tropes have also crossed Italy's borders, with mixed results.

141 Colombo 2002.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion: A Post-Antifascist Memory of the Holocaust?

The history of Holocaust memory in Italy that emerges from this study is one of historical continuities and discontinuities. In the first forty years after the end of the war, the Holocaust was increasingly recognised as part of the broader Italian war experience. However, this very inclusion into a narrative based on national victimhood, innocence, and – particularly on the left – redemptive Resistance, prevented Italian public debates from thoroughly engaging with the country's historical responsibility for the event.

This more or less consciously constructed narrative of innocence was furthered by the frequent attribution of universalistic meanings to the Holocaust. Films that in other contexts were discussed as Holocaust films, were often read in quite different terms in the Italian context. By universalising the 'meaning' of the films reviewed and debated in the press, Italian debates on the Holocaust could divert attention away from the obligation to face the implications posed by the subject-matter. Notwithstanding the enormous differences between the various interpretations hailing from the left, the centre, and the right, the films and TV programmes analysed in this study were often interpreted as if they had to have some 'deeper' meaning, one that had a universal value beyond that of representing the plight of the Jews.

The reasons for this pattern are manifold. One can certainly be identified in the politicisation of public debate. Political parties are often keen to appropriate historical themes for immediate political purposes. In the case of Italy, the predominance of political parties in the media over other areas of society influenced debates considerably. But there are also other reasons. A further explanation relates to the special place occupied by

the extermination of the Jews in predominantly Christian societies, and is a reflection of the centrality of Judaism for Christian self-definition.¹ Dan Diner argues that the universalising tendency inbuilt in Christianity (originating from the rejection of Jewish particularism) offers a powerful rationale for universalising interpretations of the Holocaust.² One consequence of this universalisation is to shift the focus of attention from the historical understanding of the murder of the Jews, to what Diner defines as 'a far less binding critique of civilization and its discontents, framed largely in anthropological, not historical, terms.'³ This strategic avoidance of the analysis of the connections between a deeply ingrained, centuries-old anti-Jewish prejudice and the Holocaust was put forward by means of what Diner calls the 'humanization' of the deed. In his view, since the Jews of Europe were fed to the extermination mills not as *Jews* but as Jewish *humans*, every effort to explain – as well as to historically reconstruct – the events needs to start at the locus of humanity-centred phenomena, that is, the *general*.⁴

This universalisation of the Holocaust has been influential in Italy, home of the centre of Catholic Christianity. As I show in this study, the Catholic press often understood Holocaust films in universalising terms. The left-wing press too, offered similar interpretations. For communist factions in particular, this was propelled by an established theoretical tradition according to which Fascism and Nazism were seen as not qualitatively different from liberal capitalism, and the persecution of the Jews was understood as a form of infra-bourgeois conflict.⁵ This predominance of universalistic understandings of the Holocaust facilitated the development of a second crucial element of continuity in the Italian context. Since the immediate postwar period, there was general consensus on the need to portray Italy as a victim country. Being victims, Italians were also innocent (even more so since the country redeemed itself through the Resistance),

1 Heschel and Gillman 2004: 88.

2 Diner 2000: 185.

3 Diner 2000: 185.

4 Diner 2000: 228.

5 Diner 2000: 100–1.

and could not therefore portray themselves as aggressors. Thus, the burden of guilt for crimes perpetrated was entirely shifted onto the Germans and their fascist allies. The two most relevant consequences of this narrative were the downplaying of Italian guilt, and the inclusion of 'other' sufferings as subsystems of national victimhood. Another consequence noted by scholars is that the rate of 'Italian' Holocaust films (i.e. films directed by Italian filmmakers and at least partially financed by Italian producers) set outside Italy is remarkably high.

This construction has undergone a process of redefinition since the late 1980s, as has been discussed in Chapter Six. The end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Resistance narrative, and the Italian political crisis of the early 1990s that resulted in the end of the so-called First Republic, led to a much more dynamic reconfiguration of Holocaust memory. The sharp increase in the number of Holocaust representations during those years is a consequence of this process. Some of these, like *Jona che visse nella balena*, *Canone inverso* (Making Love, Ricky Tognazzi, 2000), and *Il servo ungherese* (The Hungarian Servant, Giorgio Molteni, 2004), are devoid of any reference to Italy, and continue a tradition established with *L'ebreo errante*, *Kapò*, *Andremo in città*, and *Il portiere di notte*. Others include Italian characters and are set, at least partially, in Italy. The increasing number of such products compared to their scarcity in the past signals a shift and a degree of relative openness in terms of addressing the issue of the Holocaust in Italy. Although often very poorly received and therefore constituting only minor contributions to the debate, these products are nonetheless significant and deserve mention.

The first of these films is exceptional. *Prima della lunga notte – L'ebreo fascista* (Before the Long Night – The Fascist Jew, Franco Molé, 1980) is the only film to put the impact of the racial laws on a fascist Jew on screen. Set between Bologna and Modena in the second half of the 1930s, it is the story of Oberdan (Dan) Rossi, son of a Catholic mother and of a staunchly fascist Jewish father. Following in his father's footsteps, Dan volunteers for the war in Ethiopia. Upon his return, he starts a career in journalism, disrupted by the regime's anti-Semitic policy, which is presented as the result of Italy's alliance with Germany. Dan resorts to writing a novel, only to find that his origins close still more doors. In June 1940, at the beginning

of the 'long night' of Italy's participation in the war, Dan commits suicide as his father has done before him; both are victims of persecution and of their own disillusionment. Based on a novel by Luigi Preti,⁶ the film is a *Bildungsroman* of sorts, witnessing Dan's progressive distancing from Fascism and development of an antifascist conscience, signified by his encounter with women: first the daughter of a deported German social-democrat who informs him of the reality of the Nazi regime, and then a literate, independent, and antifascist colleague. The interest of the story is nonetheless undermined by poor acting and a faltering script, and the film went largely unnoticed.

Besides this example dating from 1980, the other films set in Italy were produced in the 1990s and 2000s. Whether made for theatrical release or for TV programming, they partake in the shift toward assimilating the Jewish experience as an integral part of Italian memory. These films constitute a significant body of works, which cannot be analysed in detail here. *Il cielo cade* (The Sky Is Falling, Andrea and Antonio Frazzi, 2000) is a mournful elegy for a world on the verge of destruction epitomised by the destruction of the Einstein family on the eve of liberation.⁷ The mourning of a past loss also colours *La finestra di fronte*. Set in the present, the film is the encounter between Davide, a traumatised Jewish survivor who lost his lover Simone in the Rome roundup of October 1943, and Giovanna, a young mother of two struggling with the drudgery and routine of her life. Giovanna – similar to much of contemporary Italy – knows nothing of the events that occurred sixty years earlier in her own city. It is only when the two characters finally establish a real communication that Davide can work through his Holocaust trauma. By the same token, it is only when Giovanna learns of Davide's story and incorporates it as part of her own identity that she is able to reach a kind of self-fulfilment. Thanks to this transmission of experiential knowledge, both Giovanna and Davide can look towards the future with confidence.⁸

6 Preti 1974.

7 The film is based on Mazzetti 1962; on the film, see Marcus 2007: 99–110.

8 Picchiotti 2006: 573–9; Marcus 2007: 140–52.

Some of these recent Holocaust cinematic representations reiterate established narratives. Such is the case of *Concorrenza sleale* (Unfair Competition, Ettore Scola, 2001) which, although with a relatively gentle touch, returns to the stock stereotypes of the *commedia all'italiana* to illustrate a story of rejection of persecution by an ordinary a-political Italian. The trait of essential and inbuilt goodness as an Italian characteristic can also be found in the more troubling cases of two TV products: *18.000 giorni fa* (Eighteen Thousand Days Ago, Gabriella Gabrielli, 1993) and *La fuga degli innocenti* (The Flight of the Innocents, Leone Pompucci, 2004). The former depicts the Ferramonti camp in the southern region of Calabria where many non-Italian Jews were detained but also sheltered from extermination,⁹ while the latter is a free adaptation of the story of a group of non-Italian Jewish children housed, in spite of the German occupation, in the small town of Nonantola in Emilia-Romagna. Like the other examples discussed here, both films are concerned with the notion of Italian-ness. These films, however, do not limit themselves to eulogising ordinary Italians and civilians, they also extend gratitude to members of the fascist State, such as the director of the Ferramonti camp in *18.000 giorni fa* and Captain Alberti in *La fuga degli innocenti*. In both cases the films set these empathetic fascists against the brutality of the die-hard fanatics (such as the camp doctor and a member of the fascist guards in *18.000 giorni fa*, or the Germans in *La fuga degli innocenti*). In this way they preserve intact the image of the country and relativise fascist persecutions as a fixation of extremists.

These final few examples discussed are part of a trend, which was authoritatively sanctioned in 2000, when the Parliament passed *nem con*, the law instituting the Day of Memory of the Holocaust in Italy. The price necessarily paid for this inclusiveness has been discussed by Robert Gordon.¹⁰ The law emphasised the memory of victimhood rather than blame when committing the State to organise initiatives of reflection 'on what befell the Jewish people and the Italian military and political deportees

9 The film is loosely based on Capogreco 1987.

10 Gordon 2006a: 169–72.

in the Nazi camps.' The effect of this formulation was that the law failed to state clearly who promulgated the racial laws, who were the main victims of these laws, and who was in charge of carrying them out. Moreover, it failed to mention the word Fascism, and referred to fascists only obliquely to include some among those who opposed the Holocaust, from 'differing positions and allegiances.'¹¹ Finally, besides one reference to 'Italy's persecution of its Jewish citizens', the law set the 'Jewish people' alongside Italian political and military deportees, thus contributing to the further confusion of historically different phenomena.¹² This awkward formulation reflects both decades of persisting narratives of innocence and victimhood, together with a more recent emphasis on acts of rescue by fascists.

The most dramatic proof of this process of historical rethinking is represented by the emergence of the figure of Giorgio Perlasca. Perlasca's profile, that of convinced fascist and yet a rescuer of Jews, first emerged in public debates in the early 1990s. As Marcus has noted, the television film *Perlasca: un eroe italiano*, which aired in January 2002, was 'effective in bringing this story to public attention.'¹³ This is definitely true, but we should question whether 'public attention' per se advances historical understanding? Does it help to counter the increasingly prevalent tendency to level out differences between Fascism and antifascism and the enduring stereotype of *italiani brava gente*?

11 Gordon 2006a: 170–1. On these themes, see also Rossi-Doria 2005: 91–2.

12 Gordon 2006a: 171. The following quotes from the text of the law are taken from pp. 169–70.

13 Marcus 2005: 324.

Giorgio Perlasca¹⁴

Giorgio Perlasca came of age as a supporter of Fascism, volunteering for the wars in Abyssinia and Spain. However, disillusioned by the racial laws promulgated in 1938 and by the alliance with Nazi Germany, he distanced himself from the regime and settled in Budapest. When the Nazis invaded Hungary in October 1944, Perlasca played a major role in rescuing some 5,200 Jews. Posing as a Spanish diplomat, he took control of entire buildings on the supposed authority of an embassy that in reality had ceased working, and of a country (Spain) of which he had never been a citizen. In order to do this and thus to save lives, he swindled Nazis and Hungarian collaborators, lied about his identity, bent laws and bribed officials.

This story remained largely unknown for more than forty years. Only in 1987 did a group of Hungarian survivors track Perlasca down, and two years later he was declared 'Righteous among the Nations' by Yad Vashem (Israel's official Holocaust remembrance authority). Prompted by an article published in a local newspaper presenting Perlasca's story to the public, the MSI newspaper *Secolo d'Italia* interviewed him in October 1989.¹⁵ The story reached a much broader TV audience in April 1990, when the popular current affairs series *Mixer* dedicated a special to it. Moreover, in 1991 Enrico Deaglio, who co-authored the programme, wrote a best-selling book on the subject.¹⁶ The book and the TV programme contributed greatly to a snowballing process that has led to the rising centrality of Perlasca in Italian narratives of the Holocaust.¹⁷ In 2002, the successful miniseries *Perlasca: un eroe italiano* (RAI UNO, 28 and 29 January, 20.45) capitalised on, and represented the crowning of, a decade-long process, thus situating the symbolic figure of Giorgio Perlasca at the centre of Holocaust memory in Italy.

14 A more extensive discussion of this miniseries is in Perra 2010.

15 Toni De Santoli, "Chiunque altro al mio posto avrebbe fatto la stessa cosa." A colloquio con Giorgio Perlasca, *Secolo d'Italia* (19 October 1989): 8.

16 Deaglio 1991.

17 See also Perlasca's memoir Perlasca 1997.

By television standards, *Perlasca: un eroe italiano* was a relatively big budget production, and total costs came to over 6 million Euro. RAI went to great lengths to make sure that *Perlasca* was successful, with a strategy aimed at re-familiarising viewers with the hero while launching the miniseries, which was presented in news programmes as well as in popular shows in the weeks prior the broadcast.¹⁸ These references to the miniseries in popular shows were supplemented by an impressive barrage of advertisements targeting different niches of potential viewers. Moreover, on the eve of its broadcast, a shortened version of the miniseries was screened in the Chamber of Deputies before some of the highest representatives of the State, Jewish institutions, as well as the Israeli ambassador Ehud Gol.¹⁹ *Perlasca*'s story made the front pages, almost sixty years after its constituent events occurred. The launch was effective, and the series was a triumph, watched by over 11 million viewers (38.91 per cent) on the first night and almost 13 million (43.81 per cent) on the second.²⁰

The Holocaust as a vehicle of a post-antifascist national identity

While *Perlasca*'s political heterodoxy had made his story unappealing in the past, in 2002 the country united in front of their screens to commemorate him.²¹ Two factors, emerging from the public debate engendered by the miniseries, help to explain the role it played in current Italian culture. First,

18 *TG2 Dossier* (26 January, RAIDUE); *Uno mattina*, 28 January 2002, *La vita in diretta*, 22, 28 and 29 January, *Carramba che sorpresa!*, 24 January, and *Domenica In*, 25 January, all on RAIUNO.

19 Priscilla Del Ninno, 'Perlasca, l'eroe che sfidò l'oblio', *Secolo d'Italia* (23 January 2002): 18.

20 Grasso 2008: 581.

21 Enrico Deaglio, 'Quando la memoria fa audience', *la Repubblica* (30 January 2002): 1, 17.

by watching the miniseries, viewers were invited to side with absolute good against absolute evil. This binary division is well established in Holocaust representations in popular culture. What is noteworthy about *Perlasca* is that absolute good happens to be incarnated by a cunning Italian.²² Similar to the Caracciolo documentary *Il coraggio e la pietà* discussed in Chapter Six and to numerous other products, the story of *Perlasca* was tailored to the Italian public because it confirmed a familiar negative stereotype, but reversed this into a positive sign of altruism.²³ Co-screenwriter Sandro Petraglia explicitly claimed that *Perlasca*'s buoyant manners, ingenuity, courage, and ability to lie and cheat made him 'strongly Italian.'²⁴ The choice to subtitle the miniseries 'An Italian Hero' served to extend his attitude to the whole nation, in relation to the persecution of the Jews in Italy. In other words, the work corroborated the following syllogism: a fascist like *Perlasca* bent the rules to do good; 'Italians' bend the rules, too; 'Italians' (including fascists) did good, notwithstanding the anti-Semitic laws. Those who did *not* do good behaved in an un-Italian manner.

The series' decidedly nation-specific quality was heavily influential in shaping Italian responses to it. In fact, while American reviewers saw *Perlasca* as a cliché-ridden, unmoving, and even pornographic vulgarisation of the Holocaust,²⁵ reactions in Italy were overwhelmingly positive. The conservative newspaper *Liberio* pointed out that the 'character's outgoing and even scoundrel-like Italian-ness was [the miniseries'] trump

22 Alessandra Comazzi, 'Tredici milioni di Perlasca', *La Stampa* (31 January 2002): 28.

23 Cicali 2002.

24 Silvia Fumarola, 'Perlasca, il sublime bugiardo che salvò cinquemila ebrei', *la Repubblica* (19 January 2002): 47; Alessandra Comazzi, 'Lo sceneggiato sull'italiano che salvò cinquemila ebrei', *La Stampa* (29 January 2002): 27.

25 Anita Gates, 'An Oskar Schindler in Italy', *New York Times* (15 April 2005) <<http://movies.nytimes.com/2005/04/15/movies/15perl.html>>; Ronnie Scheib, 'Perlasca', *Variety* (14 April 2005) <<http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117926827.html?categoryid=31&cs=1>>; Jan Stuart, 'Now Playing', *Newsday.com* (15 April 2005) <http://www.newsday.com/entertainment/movies/ny-etfourth4216789apr15,0,5230437.story?coll=nyc-movies-now-playing-reviews> [consulted in October 2009]

card.' *Avvenire* added that in highlighting particular Italian characteristics, Perlasca gave them back a sense of national honour, thus contributing to the reconstruction of a shared collective identity (i.e. one that set aside the Fascism/antifascism divide).²⁶ *La Stampa* wrote that *Perlasca* made Italians feel proud of themselves, just as the 1982 football World Cup winning team had done.²⁷ The left-wing press also recommended the miniseries to readers, and acknowledged *Perlasca*'s unqualified 'Italian-ness'.²⁸

Sociologist Giovanni Bechelloni has further stressed the idea that *Perlasca* represents Italy. Comparing the success of *Perlasca* with that of another miniseries of the same season on Pope John XXIII, Bechelloni observed that the two characters embodied deeply rooted social groups in Italian history, such as peasants and traders.²⁹ Roncalli and *Perlasca* symbolise an Italy of non-ideological 'doers', inherently universal (i.e. Catholic in Bechelloni's view) in their values, pitted against a country of intellectual and priestly 'wastrels'.³⁰ Notwithstanding their differences, each of these interpretations point to the collapse of politically-motivated heroism as a privileged source of positive national identity. Situated within a generalised rise in Holocaust consciousness and emphasis on rescuers, *Perlasca*'s story of pre-political heroism became a viable across-the-board source of national identity based on Italian 'kindness' in moral terms.³¹

However, *Perlasca* was not just an Italian. The second crucial element of the *Perlasca* political-cultural formula was that he had been a fascist. *Perlasca*'s heterodox Fascism fits well with developments on the right of

26 This resulted from an exchange between a reader and the newspaper's editor Dino Boffo; see 'Lettere al direttore, *Perlasca*, un patriottismo a nostra misura', *Avvenire* (6 February 2002): 20. This same view was also expressed by RAI General Manager Claudio Cappa interviewed in Fumarola, 'Perlasca superstar'.

27 Alessandra Comazzi, 'L'eroe dal volto umano ha la forza di Zingaretti', *La Stampa* (29 January 2002): 27.

28 Michele Sarfatti, 'I giusti, gli ingiusti e l'onore italiano' *L'Unità* (25 January 2002): 1, 31; Serena Paolini, 'Perlasca, l'eroe impostore', *il manifesto* (23 January 2002): 16; Norma Rangeri, 'La storia conquista la Rai', *il manifesto* (30 January 2002): 20.

29 Bechelloni 2003: 90.

30 Bechelloni, 2003: 115.

31 See Jansen 2008: 157.

the political spectrum. In fact, since the formation of AN as a post-fascist evolution of MSI, the party has notably distanced itself from the fascist regime as regards the Holocaust, a precondition for international respectability.³² The memory of *Perlasca* played a part in this process. A paragraph in the 1995 'Theses of the Fiuggi Congress', which marked the birth of the new formation, explicitly condemned every form of anti-Semitism, even when 'camouflaged with the propaganda of anti-Zionism and anti-Israel polemics'.³³ Among the first supporters of the statement, which was drafted by journalist Enzo Palmesano, was Franco *Perlasca*, son of Giorgio and a mid-rank party functionary. Through the mediation of his son Franco, *Perlasca*'s figure was appropriated to strengthen and legitimise the party's political and cultural shift.

This reframing was consistent with a number of moves made by the party before and after the programme. Only days prior to the broadcast and the annual commemoration of the Day of Memory, AN President Gianfranco Fini distanced his party from its fascist heritage by retracting his 1994 definition of Mussolini as 'the greatest statesman of the century'.³⁴ In September 2002, interviewed by the Israeli liberal newspaper *Haaretz*, Fini explicitly apologised for the sufferings caused to the Jews of Italy by the 1938 racial laws passed by the regime.³⁵ The next year, during his visit to Israel, he denounced the 'infamous racial laws promulgated by Fascism'.³⁶

Fini's increasingly outspoken rejections of Fascism reconciled the Italian right with the State of Israel and with Italian Jewish Communities in the realm of high politics. Roberto Chiarini has recently noted that the

32 Tarchi 2006.

33 Tarchi 2003: 150.

34 'La Repubblica/Politica: Fini ci ripensa: "Non è Mussolini il più grande"', *la Repubblica* (22 January 2002) <<http://www.repubblica.it/online/politica/finiduce/finiduce/finiduce.html>> [consulted October 2009]

35 Adar Primor, 'Ebrei, il mea culpa di Fini: Perdono per le leggi razziali', *la Repubblica* (13 September 2002): 11.

36 'Repubblica.it/politica: Fini in Israele "Il fascismo fu parte del male assoluto"', *la Repubblica* (24 November 2002), <<http://www.repubblica.it/2003/k/sezioni/politica/finisr/leggi/leggi.html>> [consulted October 2009]

miniseries *Perlasca* functioned to ensure that this reconciliation was 'sanctioned and shared on a very wide scale by public opinion.'³⁷ In other words, popular culture mirrored high politics. As columnist Barbara Spinelli noted, the story of a fascist sympathiser who rejected anti-Semitism and heroically rescued Jews while maintaining his right-wing political identity, acquired a special political and cultural value, challenging the established antifascist image of AN as trapped in its own past, as well as antifascism's exclusive claim of solidarity with the Jews.³⁸

In this sense then, Perlasca's distancing of himself from Fascism after 1938, which for years had hindered his public recognition from the MSI, was now an asset, and Perlasca could be presented as a precursor of the party's post-fascist stand. However, Fini and AN's outright rejection of fascist anti-Semitism was balanced by a more problematic counterclaim. If, as stated at the outset, recent normalising narratives about Fascism insisted on presenting it as a regime whose only unforgivable crime was represented by its participation in the Holocaust, then coming to terms with that aspect of its history would liberate AN from any burden of the past.³⁹ This assumption helps explain the response to the miniseries among some of AN's top figures. According to AN parliamentary deputy Adolfo D'Urso, *Perlasca* freed the party and its leader from the need for further legitimisation, thus implying that Fini ought be invited to Israel.⁴⁰ To the same end, a few months later Maurizio Gasparri, who was then Minister of Communications, gave a copy of the miniseries to Israeli president Moshe Katsav, claiming that it was about 'a fascist who saved five thousand Jews, and of whom [the right] should not be ashamed.'⁴¹ The Minister for Italians in the World and veteran of the RSI Mirko Tremaglia went even further:

37 Chiarini 2008: 28.

38 Barbara Spinelli, 'L'esempio di Perlasca: Il coraggio e il silenzio di un uomo', *La Stampa* (3 February 2002): 1.

39 Pivato 2007: 90.

40 Barbara Jerkov, 'Perlasca commuove la Camera: Quel fascista, eroe d'Italia', *la Repubblica* (23 January 2002): 11.

41 Alessandra Longo, 'Gasparri apripista in Israele: Fini verrà, i veti sono caduti', *la Repubblica* (5 November 2002): 21.

Perlasca was a 'truly powerful and touching film ... that ... exalted the splendid humanity and heroism of a fascist Italian.'⁴² Speaking as a guest at AN's convention a few months after the broadcast, the then Speaker of the Lower Chamber of Parliament Pierferdinando Casini explicitly praised the 'good fascist' Perlasca, reportedly amidst roaring and proud applause from the crowd.⁴³

Nostalgic excesses aside, there is a further troubling aspect in the debate around *Perlasca*, best exemplified by an article by right-wing intellectual Marcello Veneziani.⁴⁴ According to Veneziani, Perlasca's case was not an isolated one, since both fascist authorities and Italian citizens sheltered as many Jews as possible. In Veneziani's view, Italians fared better than any other country during the Holocaust, and should stop criticising themselves (a set of arguments often encountered in this work). He then drew an invidious but telling parallel between the number of Italians killed in the 'Communist *foibe*' (a series of mass executions in Istria and around Trieste carried out by Yugoslavian Titoist partisans) and that of Italian Jews exterminated in the camps, claiming that the former was higher. This kind of competitive claim is far from exceptional, as it is part of the long-term revisionist trend based on countering fascist crimes with antifascist violence perpetrated during and after the Resistance, and the horrors of the Holocaust with those of Communism. This trend has advocated the establishment of a memory implicitly aimed at erasing historical and moral distinctions.⁴⁵ Consistent with this view, Veneziani's article ended by questioning why only the Holocaust is commemorated on the Day of Memory.

In 2004 the Italian Parliament, led by a centre-right majority, instituted the 'Day of Remembrance' for the victims of *foibe*, to be commemorated

42 Cinzia Romani, 'La Rai riscopre il fascista che salvò migliaia di ebrei', *Il Giornale* (23 January 2002): 38.

43 Antonello Caporale, 'Destra, destra, destra, spunta l'orgoglio delle origini', *la Repubblica* (7 April 2002): 10; Michele Serra, 'Facce di popolo e anima nera: Piccola antropologia di AN', *la Repubblica* (8 April 2002): 10.

44 Marcello Veneziani, 'Ricordiamoci la lezione di Hannah Arendt', *Il Giornale* (26 January 2002): 26.

45 Pivato 2007; Spinelli 2001: 227.

every 10 February, the anniversary of the 1947 Paris peace treaty sanctioning Italy's loss of the territories east of Trieste, and the ensuing resettlement of 300,000 Italians away from Yugoslavia. The subtext underlying the Day of Remembrance and the Day of Memory, separated by a mere fortnight, implicitly compares the two tragedies, suggesting that while the Holocaust shows man's inhumanity to man, the *foibe* represents what communists did to Italians. The miniseries *Perlasca* and its reception were partly embroiled in this radical shift.

The paradox is that in some quarters an extremely selective memorialisation of the Holocaust is being used to substantially re-legitimise Fascism. Italy's persistent shortcomings in confronting its historical responsibilities in the sixty years separating it from the end of the Second World War have paved the way for this revisionist process. If, as this reasoning goes, Perlasca is a 'Righteous among the Nations,' then his enthusiastic adhesion to Fascism until 1938, including volunteering in the regime's colonial and anti-Republican wars against Ethiopia and Spain, is not a decisive blemish. According to this relativising view then, if what truly defines Italian innocence and guilt is their approach to the Holocaust, and fascists could act heroically to rescue Jews, then all differences between Fascism and antifascism are automatically elided.

The story of Giorgio Perlasca is a fixture of current public debates on the Holocaust in Italy. Since the broadcast of the miniseries, his name has become the point of reference for the increasing number of stories of rescue (often by fascists) salvaged from oblivion and presented to the public, both in the press and in popular television programmes.⁴⁶ This emphasis on rescuers is consistent with long term trends in Italian narratives of the war and the Holocaust. As this book has shown, several aspects of this process suggest cause for concern.

46 For example, after the broadcast, local editions of the newspaper *la Repubblica* 'discovered' local 'Perlascas' in Bari, Genoa, Rome, Palermo, and Florence. On television, see the story of Marina Limentani, rescued along with her sister by a local fascist during the round up of Rome's Jews on 16 October 1943 and interviewed on the popular afternoon show *Casa RAIUNO* on 27 January 2004.

There is nonetheless also a brighter side of the story to take into account. The rise of Perlasca as the quintessential Italian rescuer, and his political beliefs, opened up space for a less charged and politically divisive approach to the issue of Italy's responsibility during the conflict, not so much in the scholarly literature, where this was already an established feature, but in mass media such as television. Even popular afternoon talk shows now acknowledge Italy's share of blame in the Holocaust. However, this acknowledgement comes at the price of downplaying the regime's crimes before 1938 and those not directly Holocaust-related, as well as levelling out all distinctions between fascists and antifascists. A third and final problem is that the popular media representation of these Holocaust stories invites emotional identification rather than critical reflection.⁴⁷ This is another long-term characteristic of a country that, even when committed to memory as Italy now is, often fails to convert this memory into a system of values capable of directing present and future choices. A more accurate understanding of Italy's past, and of the ways this past has been remembered, is a necessary step towards cultivating that system of values.

47 Bidussa 2009: 8.

List of Films and TV Programmes

Films

Cavalleria [Cavalry] (1936) Goffredo Alessandrini.
Luciano Serra pilota [Luciano Serra, Pilot] (1938) Goffredo Alessandrini.
Gone with the Wind (1939) Victor Fleming.
Roma città aperta [Open City] (1945) Roberto Rossellini.
Paisà [Paisan] (1946) Roberto Rossellini.
Monsieur Verdoux (1947) Charles Chaplin.
L'ebreo errante [The Wandering Jew] (1948) Goffredo Alessandrini.
Ostatni Etap [The Last Stop] (1948) Wanda Jakubowska.
Il grido della terra [The Cry of the Land] (1949) Duilio Coletti.
Il monastero di Santa Chiara – Napoli ha fatto un sogno [The Monastery of Saint Clare – Naples Has Made a Dream] (1949) Mario Sequi.
Carica eroica [Heroic Charge] (1952) Francesco De Robertis.
Penne nere [Black Feathers] (1952) Oreste Biancoli.
Febbre di vivere [Eager to Live] (1953) Claudio Gora.
I fidanzati [The Fiancées] (1953) script by Vasco Pratolini and Franco Zeffirelli.
I sette dell'Orsa Maggiore [Human Torpedoes] (1953) Duilio Coletti.
Divisione Folgore [Folgore Division] (1954) Duilio Coletti.
Nuit et Brouillard [Night and Fog] (1956) Alain Resnais.
Belle ma povere [Poor Girl, Pretty Girl] (1957) Dino Risi.
Lazzarella (1957) Carlo Ludovico Bragaglia.
Vacanze a Ischia [One Week with Love] (1957) Mario Camerini.
The Diary of Anne Frank (1959) George Stevens.
Il Generale della Rovere [General della Rovere] (1959) Roberto Rossellini.
La grande guerra [The Great War] (1959) Mario Monicelli.

16 ottobre 1943 [16 October 1943] (1960) Ansano Giannarelli.
Ceneri della memoria [Ashes of Memory] (1960) Alberto Caldana.
La ciociara [Two Women] (1960) Vittorio De Sica.
La dolce vita (1960) Federico Fellini.
Kapò [Kapo] (1960) Gillo Pontecorvo.
La lunga notte del '43 [The Long Night of '43] (1960) Florestano Vancini.
Rocco e i suoi fratelli [Rocco and His Brothers] (1960) Luchino Visconti.
Tutti a casa [Everybody Go Home] (1960) Luigi Comencini.
Judgment at Nuremberg (1961) Stanley Kramer.
L'oro di Roma [The Gold of Rome] (1961) Carlo Lizzani.
I sequestrati di Altona [The Condemned of Altona] (1962) Vittorio De Sica.
Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa ... [Sandra] (1965) Luchino Visconti.
Andremo in città [We'll Go to the City] (1966) Nelo Risi.
La caduta degli dei [The Damned] (1969) Luchino Visconti.
Z (1969) Costa-Gavras.
Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini [The Garden of the Finzi-Continis] (1970) Vittorio De Sica.
La strategia del ragno [The Spider's Stratagem] (1970) Bernardo Bertolucci.
Le chagrin et la pitié [The Sorrow and the Pity] (1971) Marcel Ophüls.
Diario di un italiano [Diary of an Italian] (1973) Sergio Carogna.
Rappresaglia [Massacre in Rome] (1973) George Pan Cosmatos.
Il portiere di notte [The Night Porter] (1974) Liliana Cavani.
Pasqualino Settebellezze [Seven Beauties] (1975) Lina Wertmüller.
La linea del fiume [Stream Line] (1976) Aldo Scavarda.
Prima della lunga notte – L'ebreo fascista [Before the Long Night – The Fascist Jew] (1980) Franco Molé.
Mephisto (1981) István Szabó.
Missing (1982) Costa-Gavras.
Shoah (1985) Claude Lanzmann.
Gli occhiali d'oro [The Gold Rimmed Glasses] (1987) Giuliano Montaldo.
The Righteous Enemy (1987) Joseph Rochlitz.

Music Box (Costa-Gavras, 1989)
18.000 giorni fa [Eighteen Thousand Days Ago] (1993) Gabriella Gabrielli.
Jona che visse nella balena [Jonah Who Lived in the Whale] (1993) Roberto Faenza.
Schindler's List (1993) Steven Spielberg.
Survivors of the Holocaust (1996) Allan Holzman.
Memoria [Memory] (1997) Ruggero Gabbai.
La terza luna [The Third Moon] (1997) Matteo Belinelli.
La tregua [The Truce] (1997) Francesco Rosi.
L'ultimo bersaglio [Last Target] (1997) Andrea Frezza.
La vita è bella [Life Is Beautiful] (1997) Roberto Benigni.
Jakob the Liar (1999) Peter Kassovitz.
Canone inverso [Making Love] (2000) Ricky Tognazzi.
Il cielo cade [The Sky Is Falling] (2000) Andrea and Antonio Frazzi.
Concorrenza sleale [Unfair Competition] (2001) Ettore Scola.
Amen. (2002) Costa-Gavras.
La finestra di fronte [Facing Windows] (2003) Ferzan Özpetek.
Il servo ungherese [The Hungarian Servant] (2004) Giorgio Molteni.

Television programmes

'Il prezzo della pace' [The Price of Peace] (1959) Episode of *50 anni (1898–1948)*. Gian Vittorio Baldi. Programma Nazionale. 8 February. 22.10.
 'Fasti del Terzo Reich' [Splendour of the Third Reich] (1961) Episode of *Anni d'Europa*. Liliana Cavani. Secondo Programma. 1 December. 21.00.
Il giudice [The Judge] (1961) Enzo Biagi. Programma Nazionale. 21 June. 22.35.

- 'Hitler al potere' [Hitler in Power] (1961) Episode of *Anni d'Europa*. Liliana Cavani. Secondo Programma. 24 November. 21.15.
- 'Hitler Überall' (1962) Episode of *Anni d'Europa*. Liliana Cavani. Secondo Programma. 19 October. 21.00.
- 'Una lapide in via Mazzini' [A Plaque on Via Mazzini] (1962) Episode of *Racconti dell'Italia di oggi*. Mario Landi. Secondo Programma. 10 October. 21.00.
- 'Il Terzo Reich brucia' [The Third Reich Burns] (1962) Episode of *Anni d'Europa*. Liliana Cavani. Secondo Programma. 26 October. 21.00.
- Processo a Gesù* [The Trial of Jesus] (1963) Sandro Bolchi. Programma Nazionale. 10 May. 21.05.
- Europa per la libertà* [Europe for Freedom] (1965) Emmanuele Milano and Giovanni Salvi. Programma Nazionale. 2 and 9 April. 21.00.
- Il giorno della pace* [The Day of Peace] (1965) Liliana Cavani. Programma Nazionale. 7 May. 21.00.
- 'Il complotto di luglio' [The July Plot] (1967) Episode of *Teatro-Inchiesta*. Vittorio Cottafavi. Secondo Programma. 18 July. 21.00.
- 'Missione Wiesenthal' [Wiesenthal Mission] (1967) Episode of *Teatro-Inchiesta*. Vittorio Cottafavi. Programma Nazionale. 30 April. 21.00.
- Segnalibro* [Bookmark] (1967) Enzo Convalli. Programma Nazionale. 8 May. 18.45.
- 'La notte dei lunghi coltelli' [The Night of the Long Knives] (1968) Episode of *Teatro-Inchiesta*. Gunther Gräwert [ZDF]. 6 June. Programma Nazionale. 21.00.
- Processo a Gesù* [The Trial of Jesus] (1968) Gianfranco Bettetini. Programma Nazionale. 12–13 April. 21.00.
- 'Il Generale della Rovere' [General della Rovere] (1969) Episode of *La vera storia di ...* Piero Nelli. Secondo Programma. 13 May. 21.15.
- 'Reato di stampa. Processo al giornalista Karl Von Ossietzky' [The Trial of Journalist Karl Von Ossietzky] (1969) Episode of *Teatro-Inchiesta*. John Olden. Secondo Programma. 17 January. 21.15.
- Il muro* [The Wall] (1970) Leandro Castellani. Programma Nazionale. 24 March. 21.00.

- Il sacrificio di Varsavia* [The Sacrifice of Warsaw] (1970) Yannick Bellon. Secondo Programma. 22 July. 22.45.
- Boomerang. Ricerca in due sere* [Boomerang. Enquiry in Two Evenings] (1971) Paolo Gazzara. Secondo Programma. 27 April. 21.20.
- Boomerang. Ricerca in due sere* [Boomerang. Enquiry in Two Evenings] (1971) Paolo Gazzara. Secondo Programma. 17 August. 21.15.
- 'L'esperimento' [The Experiment] (1971) Episode of *Teatro-Inchiesta*. Dante Guardamagna. Programma Nazionale. 2 December. 21.30.
- 'Progetto Norimberga' [Nuremberg Project] (1971) Episode of *Teatro-Inchiesta*. Gianni Serra. Programma Nazionale. 13 and 15 April. 21.00.
- La rosa bianca* [The White Rose] (1971) Alberto Negrin. Programma Nazionale. 4 and 11 February. 21.30.
- Il dolore e la pietà* [The Sorrow and the Pity] (1972) Episode of *Passato prossimo*. Stefano Munafò and Ezio Pecora. 19 and 26 September. Secondo Programma. 21.15.
- 'Essere ebrei oggi' [Being Jews Today] (1973) Episode of *Controcampo*. Gastone Favero. Programma Nazionale. 13 October. 22.30.
- Mosè: la legge del deserto* [Moses the Lawgiver] (1973) Gianfranco De Bosio. RAI.
- 'Il numero dieci (Padre Kolbe)' [Number Ten (Father Kolbe)] (1973) Episode of *Teatro-Inchiesta*. Silvio Maestranzi. Programma Nazionale. 21 April. 21.00.
- A carte scoperte con Albert Speer* [Cards on the Table with Albert Speer] (1974) Nelo Risi. Programma Nazionale. 9 July. 21.35.
- 'Goering' (1975) Episode of *Sapere*. Alfonso Sterpellone. Programma Nazionale. 18 January. 18.35.
- 'Hitler: chi era?' [Hitler: Who Was He?] (1976) Episode of *Trent'anni dopo...io ricordo*. Enzo Biagi. Programma Nazionale. 28 January. 20.40.
- Holocaust* (1978) Marvin J. Chomsky. NBC. Broadcast in Italy: Rete 1. 20 May–19 June 1979.
- 'Un colpo di spugna?' [Clean Slate?] (1979) Episode of *TG2-Dossier*. Ennio Mastrostefano. Rete 2. 13 May. 22.00.

- Olocausto il giorno dopo* [Holocaust: The Day After] (1979) Franco Colombo, Massimo Sani, and Aul Wines. Rete 1. 17 May. 23.00.
- 'Palestinesi della diaspora' [Palestinians of the Diaspora] (1979) Episode of *TG2-Dossier*. Michele Lubrano. Rete 2. 20 May. 21.50.
- 'Olocausto italiano' [Italian Holocaust] (1979) Episode of *Antenna*. Federico Fazzuoli. Rete 1. 1 June. 20.40.
- 'Olocausto italiano: perché?' [The Italian Holocaust: Why?] (1979) Episode of *Antenna*. Arrigo Levi. Rete 1. 8 June. 20.40.
- Un pezzo di cielo* [Ein Stück Rimmel] (1982) Franz Peter Wirth. Bavaria-Filmkunst. Broadcast in Italy: RAI DUE. 4 April–23 May 1983. 20:30.
- Storia d'amore e d'amicizia* [Story of Love and Friendship] (1982) Franco Rossi. Rete 1. 24 October–28 November. 20.30.
- 'Essere ebrei in Italia oggi' [Being Jews in Italy Today] (1983) Episode of *Il chiosco*. Franco Alunni. Rete 3. 30 April. 20.30.
- Il coraggio e la pietà: Gli ebrei e l'Italia durante la Guerra 1940–1945* [The Courage and the Pity: The Jews and Italy During the 1940–1945 War] (1986) Nicola Caracciolo. RAI DUE. 9 and 16 November 1986. 21.30.
- Fascist Legacy* (1989) Ken Kirby. BBC.
- 'Omaggio a Giorgio Perlasca' [Tribute to Giorgio Perlasca] (1990) Episode of *Mixer*. Enrico Deaglio and Gianni Barcellona. RAI DUE. 30 April. 21.35.
- Perlasca: Un eroe italiano* [Perlasca: The Courage of a Just Man] (2002) Alberto Negrin. RAI UNO. 28–29 January. 20.45.
- La fuga degli innocenti* [The Flight of the Innocents] (2004) Leone Pompucci. RAI UNO. 27 January. 14.10.
- La Guerra sporca di Mussolini* [Mussolini's Dirty War] (2008) Giovanni Donfrancesco. History Channel. 14 March. 21.00.

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